A TREATISE

ON

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE:

Its Nature, Evidences, and Advantages.

BY

REV. CHARLES BUCK,

AUTHOR OF THE THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY.

"TRIBULATION worketh patience, and patience *experience*, and *experience* hope: and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."—ROM. v. 3–5.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Board of Publication of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church are happy in being able to present to the Christian public the valuable Treatise of the Rev. CHARLES BUCK, on Religious Experience. The name of the author of this work is of itself a sufficient recommendation of it. Few, if any of the numerous persons, who, in these modern days, have treated upon the various subjects of practical religion, have gained a higher reputation, or enjoyed a greater degree of favor among the professed followers of Christ than the writer of this volume. His works have obtained a large circulation, and been instrumental of very great good. His "Theological Dictionary" has passed through numerous editions both in England and in this country. It has been regarded by many as a standard on both doctrinal and practical subjects, as well as on matters of ecclesiastical history, and as almost indispensable in every well-selected theological library.

The present work is on a subject deeply interesting to the true Christian, and is well adapted to be an important help to him, not only in ascertaining the operations of the Spirit of God upon his heart, but in meeting the various changes, and prosecuting the pleasing though often difficult course of the divine life. It may indeed be objected to as being defective in logical arrangement. The subject is not treated with the analytical precision which we have a right to look for in a well digested dissertation upon an important religious topic. But we are to remember that the author's design was not to produce a work of speculative theology, or to discuss the mere doctrine or science of Religious Experience, but to furnish a plain, practical treatise adapted to the wants and circumstances of the simple-hearted and conscientious believer in Christ. And hence he has arranged his subjects in accordance with the different states and stages of the divine life. In consequence of this, his work may, moreover, be chargeable with some repetition of sentiment and perhaps of language. This was in a measure unavoidable from the plan of discussion adopted by the author. But whatever may be the literary defects of this treatise in these respects, they are amply compensated by the simplicity, spirituality, and adaptedness to the religious life of the Christian for which it is so highly distinguished. It is eminently practical in its whole bearing and tendency, and so plain that the most unlearned Christian can comprehend and profit by it. And yet at times it is so suggestive that the wisest mind can

find in it a mine of deep and delightful thought. It honors in a very high degree the word of God, for it abounds in scriptural quotations and allusions. On every question the appeal is to the law and to the testimony, and so admirably are the instructions of the sacred volume interwoven with the religious experience of the believer that he feels as if God himself was indeed speaking to him. Nor is there any stage of the divine life, nor scarcely any situation in which the Christian may be placed in which he can not here find something suited to his circumstances. If he be yet but a babe in Christ, here is the milk of the word presented in its purity and sweetness for his nourishment. If advanced in the divine life, here is the strong meat of the Gospel yet further to invigorate his graces and perfect him in holiness. If he is struggling with temptations, or encompassed with difficulties, here is much to encourage and animate him. If he is oppressed with afflictions and trials, the precious promises of the God of truth and the abundant provisions of the covenant of grace are here offered for his comfort and support. Nay, whatever his experience, whatever the dealing of the Lord with him, here he can find much to instruct, to guide, to strengthen, and to cheer him.

And in the present day, when there is such a tendency to mere formal religion—when so much stress is laid on rites and ceremonies, while vital piety is neglected, if not decried—we deem a work so practical, so evangelical, so scriptural, on the important subject of experimental religion, most appropriate. The circulation of every

such treatise is well calculated to advance the cause of vital godliness. In the confident hope that multitudes will be benefited by this little work, as thousands have already been, and in humble reliance upon the grace of God to make it the means of glorifying His name, and promoting the spiritual growth, stability, and comfort of His people, the Board have issued it from the press.

In behalf of the Executive Committee,

THOMAS M. STRONG, *Chairman.*

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A TREATISE

ON

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE.

CHAPTER I.

THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN GENERAL.

THE religion of Jesus Christ forms a most beautiful and complete system, worthy the investigation of the wise, the admiration of the righteous, and the reverence of all. It is not, however, a system formed for the mere purpose of speculation. There are many grand objects in nature which strike us with wonder, many specious schemes in philosophy which court our attention, and many productions of art which gratify our curiosity; but which, after all, leave us without that aid which our present imperfect state requires. But this divine scheme not only claims our regard, as consisting of every thing great and sublime, but is admirably adapted to our wants and circumstances as fallen, helpless creatures. It is

not, therefore, an object, the beauty of which merely presents itself to the mind, but contains blessings, promises, and prospects, suited to the heart: hence arise the necessity and propriety of experience. The report of these blessings, or the intelligence that provision is made for guilty man, can be of no avail without a real participation of them. We must not perceive only, but we must feel; and feeling, of course we experience.

Nothing, however, is more common than to despise what is termed religious experience. Infidels sneer, the cold-hearted condemn, and the ungodly ridicule it. Being unacquainted with it *themselves*, they suppose it is all the work of imagination, or the heat of enthusiasm, in *others*. But it seems not a little remarkable, that while the term is admitted, when applied to those parts of science which are founded on sensible trial, it should be rejected when applied to religion! Why should not experimental divinity be equally as reasonable as experimental philosophy? Indeed, we must be at a loss to conceive what real religion is without experience; for, however excellent it may be as a theory, we know it is nothing except it engage the affections, and regulate the conduct. It is true, it does not refuse the exercise of the understanding; it does not discard investigation; but it calls with more ardent motives to purity of principle, devotedness of mind, lively emotions, and useful exertions, than it insists on a pursuit of mere speculative notions or knowledge, which do

not at all interest the feelings, or impress the heart. And, indeed, what is the intelligent mind, the acute reasoner, the learned critic, the man that can collect, judge, review, arrange, and repeat, if he be without experience, when compared to him who, with a common understanding, enters with all the energies of his soul into the very spirit and enjoyment of divine truth? The former *beholds* the beautiful object, discerns its different features, and admires its just proportions; but the latter does more—he *actually possesses it* as his own, lives under its influence, and is transformed into its delightful image.

It must not, however, be understood that there can be genuine experience without knowledge, although there may be knowledge without experience. The truly religious are not left in a state of ignorance: they are said "to be called out of darkness into God's marvellous light;" "to have the eyes of their understanding enlightened, that they may know what is the hope of their calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." 1 Peter ii. 9. Eph. i. 18. Before there can be any experience, therefore, spiritual life and light must be communicated; for a dead man might as well be supposed to feel, as for any one to have a gracious experience without being regenerated by the power of divine grace.

Here, then, we may form some idea of the mind and character of the Christian, whose diversified experience we are about to describe. He is one who

is illuminated by the Divine Spirit, his heart is renovated, and deeply impressed with a sense of the importance of divine things: he rests not in the cold assent of the understanding, neither is he carried away by strange and enthusiastic notions. He is a happy example of light and love; he perceives the excellency and suitability of spiritual objects, possesses an ardent attachment to them, and feels their divine energy on his soul: and hence it is that his religion is of an experimental nature.

Now, to prove that this is not the effect of a weak mind, or a disordered fancy, as many suppose, we need only appeal to the following scriptures, all which have a reference to religion, as something to be experienced as well as to be known. "*Taste* and *see* that the Lord is good. *Eat*, O friends; *drink* abundantly, O beloved. Ho, every one that *thirsteth*, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and *eat;* yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Christ *in you* the hope of glory. He effectually worketh *in* them that believe. Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart." Ps. xxxiv. 8. Cant. v. 1. Isa. lv. 1. Col. i. 27. 1 Thess. ii. 13. 2 Cor. iii. 3.

But before we proceed, it is necessary to remark, that we shall not confine the term *experience* to the enjoyment *only* of the blessings of the Gospel,

but shall take it in a more enlarged sense, as referring to all that knowledge which the Christian derives from his various trials and circumstances, and all those feelings occasioned by his being in a state of warfare with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

And, first, we shall begin with what he feels from the view he has of his own heart. This he finds to be, as the Scripture represents, "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Jer. xvii. 9. He does not boast, as he once did, of an innocent nature, a sincere intention, a good heart; but confesses himself a sinful creature, unworthy of the divine favor, and, without the interposition of sovereign mercy, exposed to endless ruin. He now takes cognizance of the secret workings of his mind: he views with self-abasement the pride, envy, vanity, worldly mindedness, and folly of his corrupt nature. He laments over the sinful desires, cold affections, wandering thoughts, and evil passions of his soul, and, with the apostle, exclaims, "O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Rom. vii. 24. He clearly perceives that the picture of fallen humanity, as drawn by the divine hand, "that every imagination of the thought of the heart is only evil, and that continually" (Gen. vi. 5,) is as true as it is awful and affecting. Nor does the regenerating influence of divine grace entirely destroy these corruptions. On the contrary, in proportion as he receives light, and increases in divine knowledge, the more he is led to see his own sinfulness.

Indeed, the all-wise God does not discover to him all the depravity of his heart at once, as this would sink him into despair. He feels, however, more and more of it as he proceeds. He is still deceived by its vain pretensions, bewildered by its perpetual inconstancy, and distressed by its evil propensities. "Woe is me," is his language, "that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar." Ps. cxx. 5. He sustains a painful conflict, mourns that he serves his Lord with such little fervor, struggles hard with his powerful inbred foes, labors for a greater conformity to the divine will, and prays that he may still persevere in the midst of all that opposition which arises not only from outward evils but internal depravity.

As he advances in his journey heavenward, he experiences the vanity, mutability, and emptiness of the world. His understanding being enlightened, he sees the excellency *of*, and his will being renewed, he possesses a taste *for*, those divine things which are so far superior to all earthly good. He has, indeed, the same natural feelings in common with others; is a creature of the same wants; requires the same supports, and is capable of the same enjoyment of temporal blessings, as those around him; yet he is taught to view all these things in a different light to what they do who place all their felicity in them. While they make them their portion, he gratefully considers them as the little comfortable accommodations by the way; while they idolize them on the

one hand, or abuse them on the other, he uses them with caution, and passes on. He remembers that he is in a world that can not constitute his happiness; a world where all things are fading away; a world never designed to be his perpetual abode, or final happiness. Yea, he has been convinced, by his own experience, of the impropriety of placing confidence in creature comforts, or sublunary good. Like others, he has been tempted at times to sit down by the way; to listen to the fascinating but deceptive song of the prosperous worldling; and to imagine that yet celestial flowers were to be gathered on earthly ground. But, like Jonah, he has no sooner looked with complacency on his gourd, and beheld with pleasure the comforts around him, than he has espied a worm at the root, and heard the voice of Providence commanding him to depart. I find then, says the Christian, that this is a wilderness, where the bitter streams are continually flowing; a world deceitful in its prospects, uncertain in its enjoyments, and fallacious in its promises. Here (continues he) how soon are the finest schemes frustrated; the lofty superstructure, raised by care and industry, dashed to pieces; the most lovely objects unexpectedly torn away; happy connections dissolved, and the most promising appearances exchanged for disappointment and sorrow! And shall I rest here? Here, among ruins, tempests, robbers, and a thousand evils! Can there be any thing in the complaints of the living, the groans of the afflicted, the uneasiness

of the rich, the disappointments of the multitude, and the wickedness of man, to invite me to take up my abode here? Rather, Lord, enable me to go forward; and, while I use the world without abusing it, keep my eye on that inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

Another thing which belongs to the Christian's experience is his view of sin, as that which defiles his nature, and which he considers so offensive in the sight of God. Men in general, indeed, acknowledge not only that sin has entered into the world, but that its tendency is evil and destructive. But this is nothing more than the bare assent of the understanding to the fact. The belief of it makes no impression; they still go on in their sin. Conscience, reason, law, gratitude, are all sacrificed for the pursuit of it; and indeed it forms one of the most awful sights in the universe to behold a feeble, defenceless, miserable creature, as man is, constantly insulting the Almighty, while, at the same time, he is convinced he is doing wrong. Such, however, is his conduct; and as he knows by experience the forbearance of God, he endeavors to reason himself into the belief that God will always forbear, and thus, "because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Ecc. viii. 11. But sin is not thus indulged, nor divine goodness thus abused, by the righteous. The sacred flame of divine love having been kindled in his heart, every

thing which appears to him as inimical to the will of God, fills him with horror. Convinced of the holiness of the divine nature, the spirituality of the law, and the evil there is in sin, he beholds it with the utmost detestation. He knows, too, that it is sin that interrupts his peace, damps his joy, and causes him to go mourning in the way. This is the burden he is laboring under from day to day; and though, he is made free from it as to its reigning power, yet it remains, and so taints all his works, so enervates his spiritual powers, so retards his progress, as often to make him doubt his interest in the love of God. Here it is that the real Christian is distinguished from the boasting pharisee, the formal professor, and the deceiving hypocrite. These are characters who, though they visit the temple of the Most High, engage in external acts of devotion, and call themselves the disciples of Jesus, yet, alas! never feel sin to be their burden, never lament over it in secret, nor indeed ever see its defiling nature. But the convinced mind—that mind which is truly broken and contrite—is overwhelmed with shame, and at times scarcely dares look up to the Almighty; so powerful is the conviction, and so just is the view which it has of sin. *Hear the confessions* of the true penitent: "Woe is me, I am undone. Unclean, unclean. I have sinned: what shall I do unto thee, O thou Preserver of men! I am a sinful man, O Lord. To me belongeth confusion of face. My sin is ever before me. I have sinned, and am no more

worthy to be called thy son." *Hear his prayers:* "Take away mine iniquity. Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me. Let not sin have dominion over me. Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great. Have mercy on me, O Lord." *Hear his determinations:* "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will run the way of thy commands. I will love thee, O Lord, my strength, and my Redeemer." Isa. vi. 5. Job vii. 20. Luke v. 8. Hos. xiv. 1. Ps. li. 10. Ps. cxix. 133. Ps. xxv. 11. Ps. ci. 2. Ps. cxix. 32.

But the experience of the Christian would be sad indeed, did he not find something adequate to his wishes, and calculated to support his mind under these views of himself, of the world, and of sin. Here it is, then, that he is led to embrace the Gospel as the only true remedy. Condemned by the law, oppressed with a sense of his depravity, sensible of the imperfection of his own righteousness, he is taught by the Divine Spirit to look to Jesus as his refuge. Here his burden is removed, his fears subside, his hope brightens, and his soul is set at happy liberty. Here, reposing under the shade of the cross, he admires and addresses his Saviour: "Blessed Immanuel, thou art the object of my regard: it is thy blood that cleanses from all sin: to thee I look for salvation: on thee I depend for my present happiness and future safety. Here let me dwell for ever, viewing thee as my great High Priest: while I live,

let me live to thee; and when called away from this world, let me join that celestial throng who shall sing the song of Moses and the Lamb for ever." Here we see how appropriate, how delightful the Gospel is to the true Christian. It is his strength in weakness, his light in darkness, and his greatest joy under all the opposition arising from his various enemies. He receives Jesus as his wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. To him the Saviour appears as altogether lovely. He glories in his cross, experiences the love of God as shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost, and abundantly rejoices in the finished work, and complete atonement made by his Lord and Saviour. 1 Cor. i. 30. Rom. v. 5. Gal. vi. 14.

But while he thus embraces the remedy the Gospel affords, and is dependent on free grace alone for salvation, yet he does not think himself at liberty to neglect the divine commands, and make Christ a minister of sin. Another part of his experience, therefore, is that in which he not only sees but feels the happy effects of divine truth upon his own mind. He finds that the sacred oracles are not to be received into the memory merely, but treasured up in the heart, as matter for meditation, preventions fron danger, directions in difficulty, and motives to obedience. With the sacred writers he can say, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. O, how I love thy law! I re-

joice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil. Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." Job xxiii. 12. Ps. cxix. 11. Jer. xv. 16. Thus the holy Scriptures are made pleasant and profitable to the true Christian. They purify his mind, refine his taste, warm his heart, curb his passions, exalt his affections, and direct his steps. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Bible is his companion—he can not live without it. It is the extensive field in which he roams; where grow the fragrant flowers, where flow the refreshing streams, where he breathes celestial air, and where the most enlarged prospects animate and delight his soul. Here, after the toils and labors of the day, he repairs and recruits his strength. Here he forgets the world, enters into the solemn thought of his immortality, and aspires after that bliss which his God and Saviour hath promised to bestow.

But he is not insensible to the favors of a benign Providence. Though a traveller to a better country, he knows how to value the blessings of this. Indeed, he is the only character who uses them as they ought to be used—while he relishes the comforts of life, he is led to enjoy God in them. "While bad men snatch the pleasures of the world as by stealth, without countenance from God, the proprietor of the world, *he* sits down openly to the feast of life under the smile of approving Heaven." Far from wearing the countenance of an ascetic, or influenced by the principle of a misanthropist, he considers himself placed as in a

delightful temple, where all the beauties of nature, and the bounties of Providence, all tend to reflect the glory of his sovereign Lord. Here, while he muses, his mind brightens, his heart expands; his soul burns with celestial ardor, while he exclaims, "O! how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee! How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God! Bless the Lord, O my soul, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies, who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; bless the Lord, O my soul." Ps. xxxi. 19. Ps. ciii. 1, 2.

While the mind is thus employed it would be unnecessary to attempt to prove its happiness. It is impossible it should be otherwise; but it may be necessary to remark, that what we have already observed are not the only sources of its felicity. The mind has access to the Supreme Being through his works and word; but it does not consist in a cold contemplation of his existence—a mere belief of the grandeur of his nature and perfections. Believers are said to be partakers of the divine nature; they bear the divine image; are brought to love what God loves, to avoid what he has prohibited, and to acquiesce with his sovereign will. What, then, is the consequence of this union? The Scripture shall speak for us: "Truly our *fellowship* is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called us to the fellowship of his Son. He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him; and

we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us." 1 Jo. i. 3. 1 Cor. i. 9. 1 Jo. iii. 24. To those who never had the divine glory in view, who never saw the beauty of holiness, and who never enjoyed the divine presence, this may appear as unintelligible mysticism; but it really makes a part of the Christian's experience. Communion with God, in which the soul is lifted above the world, filled with sublime joys, and fired with the prospect of the everlasting enjoyment of his favor in a future world, surely cannot be unworthy of the pursuit of a rational creature. If the Divine Being is to be our portion and our happiness hereafter, nothing can be more reasonable than a desire to enjoy something of this divine pleasure while by the way. But we will not now stay to oppose the arguments of the unbeliever, or attempt to make that clear to others which only experience can explain. Let me turn to you, O believer, and ask, is not fellowship with God a reality? Have you not found some of your happiest moments when your mind has been led out to God? And though uninterrupted communion has not been your lot, nor will be the lot of any while here below, yet have you not rejoiced with a joy unspeakable and full of glory? How light then has been the burden, which before you thought you could not sustain! How insignificant has the world appeared in your view! How have his smiles alleviated your pain, borne you up under accumulated difficulties, and sweetened all the crosses and troubles of life! Ah!

how have you then welcomed all the oppositions of your enemies, forgotten the discouragements of the way, and pressed with redoubled ardor towards that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God!

But it is not to be supposed that all these feelings are possessed, and this happiness enjoyed, in a state of inactivity and unconcern. We know that the Almighty can impress the minds of his creatures at any time without the use of means; but we know, also, that he does not in general do so: for as, in the natural world, he hath ordained the sun by which we are warmed, created air by which we breathe, and provides food by which we are supported; so, in the moral and spiritual world, he hath appointed means through which he communicates blessings of a spiritual nature to his people. The utility of these means the Christian finds by his own experience. The throne of grace he knows to be an important and suitable institution. Here he comes with all his wants, trials, and exercises of mind. He opens his heart, and makes known his requests to his heavenly Father. He implores the Holy Spirit to remove his ignorance, console his mind, and instruct him in divine things. He finds it good to draw near to God. His mind is often relieved, his faith increased, and his soul rendered alive to its immortal interests. Whatever others do, he finds he can not live with any degree of pleasure without giving himself up to God perpetually; and though the frame of his mind

varies, yet both duty and interest prompt him to engage in this delightful exercise. This spirit of prayer we find characterizing all the saints of God. I will not let thee go (said Jacob), unless thou bless me. O that thou wouldst bless me indeed, prays Jabez. I will order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments, cries Job. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, says David. Gen. xxxii. 26. 1 Chron. iv. 10. Job xxiii. 3. Ps. lxi. 3. But it would be superfluous to multiply instances. The throne is erected, the Saviour waits to hear; the Christian sees his privilege, and, leaving the world and its care, he retires, he pleads, he praises, he consecrates himself to the Lord; and thus his spiritual strength is renewed, and his soul comforted by the way.

How pleasant is the Sabbath, also, to the true Christian! He finds it to be the day of rest, of joy, of instruction, and of praise. While others profane it by idleness and dissipation, business and pleasure, luxury and wantonness, he desires to spend it in the service of his Lord and Master. After the cares of the week, and the toils of business, with what happy sensations does he hail its return! How glad is he when, after the slumbers of the night, he opens his eyes, and recollects it is the day which the Lord hath made! With what pleasure can he sing,

> Welcome, sweet day of rest,
> That saw the Lord arise;
> Welcome to this reviving breast,
> And these rejoicing eyes!

With the return of this day a thousand pleasing reflections occur to his mind. It calls to his recollection the final completion of the works of creation, and the triumphal resurrection of his Lord and Saviour. It reminds him of the great kindness of the Almighty in making such a merciful provision for his creatures. He hears the heavenly voice, saying, Soul, come up hither; bid adieu to the anxious cares of the world for a while, and rise into ardent contemplation and blissful thought. It calls him to worship, to hold communion with his Lord, and to devote himself with increased zeal to his service. It teaches him to anticipate an eternal sabbath of rest, where he hopes to enjoy the divine presence, and be employed in celebrating divine praises for ever. Whatever others think, and however others neglect this day, he finds it by experience, so truly advantageous and interesting, that, if even there were no command for its observance, he should still think it his happiness to devote a seventh part of his time more especially to the service of God. It is not a weariness to him, as it often proves to those who have no delight in spiritual exercises. He finds it to be a day of pleasure, and of profit too. From the instructions he receives, and the happiness he experiences on this day, he is better prepared to go forth and maintain the conflict with his enemies. He is enabled to carry a savor of divine things into his business through the week. It fortifies him against surrounding evils, and raises him in

some measure above the world, even while he is in it.

From public ordinances he derives much benefit. He visits the sanctuary not for the sake of curiosity, but for the purpose of instruction; not as one influenced by custom, but as one desirous of having his heart impressed, and his devotion excited. It is to him the house of God, and the gate of heaven. He can truly join the Psalmist, and say, One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand: I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." Ps. xxvii. 4. Ps. lxxxiv. 4, 11. Here it is that he repairs with willing feet. Seated in the divine temple, his mind is filled with reverence; he is humbled under a sense of his own imperfections. He now views the world through a proper medium; all the turbulent passions of the soul are hushed into silence; the guilt that he had contracted gradually diminishes as the cross is presented to his view; truths that he had almost forgotten are recalled to his mind; the powers which lay almost dormant are awakened; "serious meditations suggested, good dispositions raised, and the heart adjusted to a com-

posed and tranquil frame." When we thus consider what invaluable blessings the Christian derives from hence, it is no wonder that we hear of expressions of strong attachment to the house of God, and such holy lamentations of grief when deprived of attendance on public ordinances. "As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me; for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day. O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." Ps. xlii. 1, 2, Ps. lxiii. 1, 2.

In singing the praises of the Almighty, the Christian is often supported and refreshed. The remembrance of past mercies, present enjoyments, and the hope of future good, furnish abundant matter for his gratitude. The sacred song of praise is therefore congenial to his feelings. Pleasure arises in his soul as he celebrates the goodness of his Saviour. And if he have not the vocal powers, as many have, yet his heart is attuned, and he can cheerfully join in the sentiments inspired by the grateful recollection

of divine mercy. To the lively Christian there is no part of divine worship more agreeable or profitable than this, in which praises are sent up to heaven from the congregations of the saints. Here he experiences much happiness. For a while he forgets his cares; his heart is touched with a sense of love divine; he imagines himself in a little heaven, and would fain sing himself away to everlasting bliss. But it is not in the public assembly only that the Christian finds happiness in this delightful work. The place of his abode resounds also with cheerful strains, and his family becomes a society of harmony and peace. The hours of retirement likewise are employed in this heavenly work. Even here the Christian passes away the moments pleasantly by singing the praises of his God. The mind, abstracted from the world, and mounting up to heaven, catches the celestial fire, rejoices in the divine favor; and thus retirement is sanctified by communion with him.

" The calm retreat, the silent shade,
With prayer and praise agree,
And seem by thy sweet bounty made
For those who follow thee.

There, if thy Spirit touch the soul,
And grace her mean abode,
O, with what peace, and joy, and love,
She communes with her God!

There, like the nightingale, she pours
Her solitary lays,
Nor asks a witness of her song,
Nor thirsts for human praise."

Thus the Christian finds happiness in this heavenly exercise, whether in the public assembly, the family, or in retirement. The saints in all ages, more or less, have found it useful and animating; and the Scriptures abound with testimonies to their warm feelings and grateful strains. "The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation. Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever: while I live will I praise thee, O Lord. I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being." Is. xii. 2, Ps. cxix. 54, Ps. lxxxix. 1, Ps. cxlvi. 2.

The ordinance of the Lord's supper is found to be exceedingly pleasant and profitable to the Christian. Here he commemorates the dying love of his adorable Saviour. He considers himself as brought into his banqueting-house, whose banner over him is love. He sits down with pleasure to the feast. He looks to Calvary by faith, and on the cross beholds this delightful motto, "The blood of Jesus cleanseth us from all sin." He finds it good to be here. It is the place of refreshment by the way. All taken up with the Saviour, he thus meditates: "Blessed Lord! and was it for me that thy blood was shed? for me, so unworthy, so vile, so sinful!

Was it for me thou wert crowned with thorns, nailed to the tree, and pierced to the heart? Was it for me that thou didst bear such indignity, suffer such pain, and at last die such an ignominious death? Was it for my sins that thou wast deserted of the Father, insulted by men, tormented by Satan, and left by all? Was it for me that thy holy soul was so exceeding sorrowful, thy face marred, and thy character vilified? Ah! Lord, was it for me that thy sufferings were so bitter, and thine agony so great as to sweat, as it were, great drops of blood? Then let me be thine. Thou hast a just claim to my body, my soul, my powers, my time, my all. Whatever I forget, let me never forget thee. To thee, O Saviour, I desire to dedicate myself. On thy merits I depend. Thy presence I implore. O that I may be thine! May I never glory but in thy cross! There may mine eye be fixed; there may my hopes centre! There may I live, there may I die, and there may I rest for ever!"

Thus we have briefly considered the nature of Christian experience in general. Those experiences which are either of a singularly distressing or happy kind we shall have to consider in some of the following pages. Our aim in this chapter has been to give an outline of Christian experience unattended with any remarkable circumstance, and which may be applicable to Christians at large. And now, my dear reader, in what has been said, can you trace any likeness of your own experience? Have you

any reason to believe that you are called out of darkness into God's marvellous light? Can you say, that whereas you were once blind, now you see? Do you feel the corruptions of your heart, and lament under a sense of your unworthiness? Have you been convinced of the vanity and emptiness of the world? Is sin the object of your hatred? and have you fled to Jesus as your only Saviour, and felt the Gospel to be the power of God to your salvation through the energy of the Divine Spirit? These are important questions; for except you have known something of these things by your own experience, you are yet a stranger to truth, and exposed to danger. Speculative notions, unattended with this, will be of no utility. A clear perception, a retentive memory, a fine genius, are excellent qualifications; but they will carry no man to heaven. The heart must be changed, the affections raised to God, as well as the mind informed, or there can be no true happiness. Our Lord does not say, except ye be intelligent, except ye be endowed with extraordinary talents; but except ye be *converted*, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. Matt. xviii. 3.

CHAPTER II.

THE ADVANTAGES OF EXPERIENCE.

THERE are very few who are disposed to doubt the advantages of experience. The ignorant novice, the deluded fanatic, the rash adventurer, may sometimes treat it with contempt; but if we turn to the more sober part of society, we shall find it to be justly appreciated, and constantly revered. Its voice is heard, and its dictates attended to, in almost every department of life. Hence the judge, the statesman, the general, the merchant, the master, the mariner, are all respected in proportion to their experience. Their persons are courted, and their decisions received, while their sentiments become the standard of public opinion. Conjecture may be ridiculed, but who can argue against experience? Who is not willing to be led by it? Who is there but must prefer it at all times, if indeed they desire to keep in the paths of prudence and safety?

As in the common concerns of life, so in religion, it is experience that is more advantageous than bare theory. The world is a tempestuous sea; and without experience we are liable to be driven about by

every wind, and at last dashed to pieces on some dreadful rock, or swallowed up in its tremendous waves. If we ask those who have advanced far in the voyage of human life, they will tell us what they have gained by it, and the evils to which they were at first exposed for the want of it. It is true, say they, we have suffered much; but our sufferings have been profitable. "For tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us. They inform us, that though no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Rom. v. 5, Heb. xii. 11.

Jesus Christ himself, "the Captain of our salvation," it is said, "was made perfect through sufferings. And though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him:" and again, saith the apostle, "in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." Heb. v. 8, 9, Heb. ii. 18. He was one, therefore, of eminent experience; he knew all the feelings of distressed humanity; and his dignity never appeared greater, nor did his character ever shine more illustrious, than in the midst of pain, of conflict, and of blood. If he, therefore, gained by ex-

perience, shall not we derive advantage from the same source?

"I have learned by experience," said one; and it must be confessed that the lessons thus obtained are likely to be more impressive and more lasting than what can be gained in any other way. They require but little exercise of the mind to recollect them. They are not like notions which are received into the head, and which soon are forgotten. These make an impression upon the heart, awaken the feelings, and very often form the character.

Of the advantages of religious experience we may observe, in the first place, that it produces wisdom and prudence. The Christian is often, in his first outset, possessed of the most lively emotions; his zeal carries him forward, and rises superior to his knowledge. He runs into extremes, and sometimes incurs disgrace. But as he advances his knowledge increases: after he has met with a few winds and storms he becomes more prudent. His zeal is more temperate. He views objects with greater attention. He begins to see his own ignorance, and to feel his own weakness. At first, like a traveller in the valley, his views were confined; but as he ascends the mount the prospect widens, and objects innumerable press upon his sight.

From the experience he has of the treachery of his own heart, the vanity of the world, and the temptations of the wicked one, he becomes more cautious and self-diffident. He sees the propriety

of those divine injunctions, "Keep thy heart with all diligence. Watch thou in all things. Come out from among them, and touch not the unclean thing. Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." Prov. iv. 26, 2 Tim. iv. 5, 2 Cor. vi. 17. He has found, by painful experience, the consequence of an unwatchful spirit. The world has assumed a variety of appearances to deceive him; he has been led, perhaps, to listen to her promises, and been deceived by her smiles. The path from duty to worldly pleasures has been strewed with flowers; the entrance has been enchanting, but the labyrinth in which he has soon found himself was hid. Satan also has insinuated, that there could be no harm in the connections, the pursuits, and the amusements of the world; that occasional deviations are excusable; that many things arise from constitution, from infirmity, and from circumstances, which are unavoidable. In several ways has he thus been attacked, and finding, by his own experience, the folly of listening for a moment to the corruptions of his heart, the voice of the world, and the suggestions of Satan, he is brought to be more vigilant, and to keep a watchful eye in every situation, and under every circumstance. He sees the justness of that declaration, "that he who trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Prov. xxviii. 26. He trembles for himself, prays for divine support, and learns to place more confidence in God as his only safety. Thus it was with Peter. He was a true Christian, a courageous

man, and full of love to his Saviour. "Though all should be offended (says he) I will not. I will go with thee to prison and to death." But how fallible is human nature, and how little did Peter know of himself! This same Peter denied his best friend, and at once became guilty of ingratitude, lying, inconstancy, and blasphemy. Great indeed was his fall; but he arose, he recovered, he wept, and returned. But what did he gain by this experience of the deceitfulness of his heart? No more do we hear him boasting, no longer does he confide in his own strength. Behold him as he goes forth to preach to the Gentiles; nothing of self, nothing of human glory, nothing of presumption appears. Behold him in his writings. What cautions, exhortations, precepts abound, all tending to show how careful, how steady, how circumspect, we should be!

But while the Christian thus learns to distrust himself, he is convinced of the necessity of placing his confidence more in God. In looking back he sees how many dangers he has escaped, how often his heart has deceived him, and how incapable he is of keeping himself. He implores that wisdom which is profitable to direct, and that support which alone can preserve him from falling. He knows that no past enjoyments, no talents he possesses, no extent of usefulness or long standing in the church will insure future safety without a constant communication of divine grace; and though a recollection of past experience be sometimes profitable, yet he can not presume

upon it. In the course of his pilgrimage he has seen many a bright sun, that hath shone all the day, at last obscured, and set in a cloud. Human nature he has found to be too fickle to gain his implicit confidence, and human events too precarious to allow him to take up his rest here. The changes he has so often witnessed among men, the sudden disappointments which have taken place where all was thought secure, the wonderful alteration of circumstances, where every thing was imagined to be fixed, have taught him to look beyond sublunary objects. "The son (saith the prophet) dishonoreth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house. *Therefore* I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation." Mic. vii. 6, 7.

It is no small consolation to him that this part of his experience brings him to act in unison with the divine command. The Bible is a book admirably adapted to the circumstances of the Christian in his passage through this vale of tears. Hence it is he is led to consult it by the way. The road is often rugged; he finds it difficult to bear up, and to bear on through many discouragements. But, in looking into the sacred volume, he there reads, "Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall di-

rect thy paths." Isa. xxvi. 4, Prov. iii. 5, 6. These he finds to be suitable directions. Convinced of his own weakness, unable to sustain his own burden, and knowing the uncertainty of all human things, he considers it as the most invaluable privilege to be under the guidance of Him who doeth all things well. With what pleasure therefore it is he goes to God! and though he knows he is too wise to be informed, and so immutable that he can not be persuaded; yet, as prayer is a means which he himself hath appointed for the consolation and relief of his people, he opens his heart, and pours out his requests before the divine throne. More especially from the experience he has had of the vanity of the world and the evil of sin, does he pray for divine grace to keep him. "Order my steps in thy word, and let not iniquity have dominion over me. Keep me as the apple of thine eye, and hide me under the shadow of thy wings. Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe. Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul unto thee." Ps. cxix. 133, Ps. xvii. 6, Ps. cxliii. 10. Here then we see that experience teaches the Christian to be more prayerful and dependent, more docile and submissive, more cautious and devoted.

To the above-mentioned effects of sound experience we may add that of humility. Who is he that is lofty and conceited, who imagines he knows every thing, who supposes he is superior to others, who looks down with contempt on those about him,

who assumes to himself airs of importance, and decides with a magisterial tone? Is it the experienced Christian? Is it he who has seen the world, who has examined without haste, and determined without rashness? Is it he who has wrestled hard with fears, conflicted with sin, and been constantly engaged in spiritual exercises? No, verily. It is the novice; it is the superficial; it is he who can converse about experience without having it—he whose mind is so contracted that, only seeing a little, imagines he comprehends the whole. He who hears much, talks more, but thinks not at all. No, reader, it is not the experienced, but the inexperienced, that is proud. Humility is gained in the school of experience. He who knows what human nature is, who has watched the operations of his own mind, and the corrupt propensities of his heart—he who is taught by the divine Spirit, who often contemplates on the glorious perfections of Jehovah, and the unspeakable excellences of his Son, finds no cause for pride. He is humbled in the dust. His thoughts, his affections, his powers, his performances, are all so contaminated, that he loathes himself. He can not pray, but he is humbled at the thought of his imperfection. He can not hear, but he laments how little he profits. He can not read, but he complains how little impression is made. He can not do anything as he would. All this humbles him. "Though I were perfect," said Job, "yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life. If I justify myself, my own mouth would condemn me." Job ix. 21.

But what advantage here? I answer, great in every respect. Happy experience, that conducts to the valley of humility; for here no complaints are heard, no ambitious desires manifested, no grievances magnified; here no envy stings, no jealousy rages, no unhappiness reigns. Here dwell peace and content; here gratitude and love adorn the countenance with pleasant smiles, and fill the heart with unspeakable joy. Here the soul, found in her true situation, welcomes all the revolutions of life without dismay; and at last meets death itself without fear.

But this leads us to consider Christian experience as teaching us moderation in our desires and pursuits. The Christian has seen the folly of feeding the imagination with schemes of grandeur and opulence. If, in the course of Providence, his path be made smooth, and his table overflow with temporal comforts, he is thankful; but elevated situations, extensive fame, or great power, are not the objects of his pursuit. He knows that felicity does not consist in the goods of life; that they who have them in the greatest abundance are not the most happy. Worldly prosperity, as it is called, is often rather the seat of anxiety than the place of ease. Thorns grow on that mount as well as roses; yea, there the storm first arrives, and there, too, the danger is the greatest. What, then, it is asked, is the Christian a man of different feelings from others? Has he not the same senses to be gratified, the same hopes to indulge, the same prospects to allure? Truly, in many respects

he has, and, being a man of like passions with others, there have been seasons in his experience when these hopes have been excited, and he has acted too much like others. Forgetting, for a moment, the noble end in view, he has been led aside by some object on which *happiness* was speciously painted; but, eagerly grasping it, alas! he has found it to be all nothing. The light has expired, and the Christian left to find his way back in darkness and guilt, exclaiming,

> Wretch that I am, to wander thus,
> In chase of false delight!

But has he gained nothing by this? Yes, surely. From his own experience, he has found the vanity of ambition and a restless spirit, and that moderation is best in all earthly pursuits. Now it is we hear him saying, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul. To whom should I go but unto thee? Thou art my portion, O Lord. While many say, who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me. Behold I come unto thee, for thou art the Lord my God." Psalm cxvi. 7, Psalm cxix. 57, Psalm iv. 6, 7, Jer. iii. 22.

From what he has suffered by afflictive dispensations, he has learnt the lessons of patience and resignation. He knew nothing of these graces till he came to be tried; for "the trial of our faith worketh patience." He finds it useless to murmur: discontent only "turns the rod into a scorpion." He is

led from his affliction to his sin, from his sin to his knees. "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good. He is a Sovereign; he must work his own will, he must accomplish his own plan. It is wrong for a worm to struggle under the foot of God, for a rebel to accuse his Sovereign, for a delinquent to criminate his Judge. It is good, therefore, that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord, for he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." 1 Sam. iii. 18, Lam. iii. 26, 33.

Another advantage which the Christian derives from experience is that of candor and forbearance; and by candor we are not to understand that disposition of mind which leads a man to view all actions alike, and to speak equally favorable of all. No; the true Christian will frown upon vice wherever he finds it: he will not spare reproof whenever it is necessary, nor be ashamed of that singularity which causes him to differ from the multitude, to whom sin appears as trifling, and by whom it is only considered as an unavoidable infirmity. He knows the weakness of man, he feels the seeds of sin within himself, and dare not boast of what *he is*, nor can he tell what he *may be*. He recollects that a Samson, the strongest man, was overcome; a Solomon, the wisest man, acted foolishly; and David, one of the holiest of men, manifested the greatest depravity. He finds there is much truth in the observation, "that there is nothing so silly that some wise man

has not said, and nothing so weak that some prudent man has not done." And, indeed, the sacred Scriptures justly observe, "that there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not." Eccl. vii. 20.

There are some unfeeling minds, however, that are ready to condemn all who do not come up to their standard; and there are others, not less culpable, who, blind to their own infirmities, seem to take delight in magnifying those of others. But these are not experienced Christians; these know little of themselves, and less of that religion which breathes nothing but kindness and charity. The experience of the energy and power of the Gospel of Christ teaches him "to bear long, to think no evil, to hope all things, and to endure all things." 1 Cor. xiii. 7. Faults are not magnified into crimes, occasional deviations are not considered as wilful transgressions, ignorance or mistake is not misconstrued into vice. No; the Christian learns to attend to the rule of the apostle, who says, "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. We, then, that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

From what he has seen of the prejudices of men, the distorted medium through which objects are viewed, the credulity of some, and the obstinate

rashness of others, he has learned to be cautious as to his decisions respecting his fellow creatures. The representations to which he has sometimes listened have proved exaggerated. In the moments of passion, things have been carried into extremes. Incidental circumstances, he has seen, have been seized to magnify the evil, and to apologize for opposition. From these things he has learned prudence, and determined not to be too precipitate in his own conclusions.

Nor will the experienced Christian be a bigot. On first entering the Christian world, he might have imagined that there could be little difference between persons who are travelling the same road, and belong to the same family, and have the same end in view. But a closer examination of the human mind, a more extensive acquaintance with things, teaches him that minds, as well as countenances, are not exactly alike; that the early association of ideas, prejudice, custom, the temperament of the human frame, and the mode of education, have caused a considerable difference of sentiment as to many things, though there may be an agreement as to the main object on the whole. What then? Does he pronounce anathemas on all who differ from him? Does he reprobate with more zeal than knowledge the conduct of those who do not see exactly as he does? Verily, however he might be thus disposed at first, from want of a clear view of things, he now finds that others must have the same liberty which he takes

himself. But it may be asked, has not a bigoted spirit been as prevalent among Christians as among others? Has not persecution, and every species of cruelty, been exercised by Christians one towards another? Alas, there is too much ground for the charge! But then it must be inquired, what kind of Christians these were? Were they, in general, men influenced by the spirit of Christianity, whose minds were illuminated by the Spirit, and whose hearts were expanded by the love of God? Certainly not. They were Christians in name only, contending only for externals, without knowing any thing of the power and efficacy of the religion of Christ. He who is a true disciple, who knows any thing of the truth experimentally, will feel a liberality of soul which a bigot knows nothing of. He will not condemn a whole community for the worthlessness of a few individuals, nor will he form an uncharitable opinion of others, because they differ from him in non-essentials. As he travels along, he beholds different companies in the same road, each distinguished by their little peculiarities; but as they are going to the same home, where all shall meet and unite, he feels an attachment to them, and wishes them prosperity in the name of the Lord.

But, among all the advantages of Christian experience, that of hope is not the least. This is one of those graces which the apostle Paul emphatically declares experience produces. We all know what pleasure is derived from hope, how friendly it is to

man, how often it sweetens human life, how it bears up the mind under its heaviest burdens. Hence it is "that there is no temper so generally indulged as hope; other passions operate by starts on particular occasions, or in certain parts of life; but hope begins with the first power of comparing our actual with our possible state, and attends us through every stage and period, always urging us forward to new acquisitions, and holding out some distant blessings to our view, promising us either relief from pain, or increase of happiness." If hope, in general, be so valuable, how useful must it be when well founded! how peculiarly advantageous to the Christian! From the experience he has had of the divine munificence, the many interpositions of divine Providence and the fulfillment of the divine promises, his hope is strengthened, and he looks forward with a degree of cheerfulness and confidence. "Having obtained help of God," he exclaims, "I continue unto this day. He has led me forth in a right way. Why, then, should I doubt of future support? Will he conduct me part of the way, and abandon me at last? That be far from him! God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not I fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." Acts xxvi. 22, Ps. cvii. 7, Ps. xxiii. 6, Ps. xlvi. 1, 2. Thus experience feeds hope, and hope produces courage, stimulates to exertion, and fills the soul with pleasure. How sweetly does it

whisper to the Christian, as he passes along, Persevere, O Christian: strength shall be given equal to thy day. Temptations may discourage, darkness may intimidate, and opposition may alarm; but these are all under the power of thy Sovereign Guide. He knows the way; he can support, yea he will not leave nor forsake thee. The mountains shall become a plain, and crooked things straight, as they have already been; all shall work together for good: and at last you shall arrive at that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Thus "hope is as the anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and entereth into that within the veil. We are saved by hope. We have for an helmet the hope of salvation. We rejoice in hope, and by hope we are purified, even as he is pure." Heb. vi, 19, Rom. viii. 24, 1 John iii. 3.

We may observe, lastly, that nothing promotes usefulness more than experience. It both creates the desire of usefulness, and actually fits for it. Who so desirous for the spread of truth as those who have seen its beauty and felt its power? Who so anxious to point miserable sinners to the Saviour, as those who have been pardoned and saved by him? Who more willing to declare his grace, and exalt his name, than those who have tasted his goodness and experienced his support? When Jesus made himself known to the woman of Samaria, she left her water-pot, and fled to the city, saying, "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did. Is

not this the Christ?" When he was presented at the temple, Anna, a prophetess, coming in that instant, gave thanks, and *spake of him* to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. When Andrew first found the Messiah, he carried the happy tidings to his brother Peter, and was the instrument of bringing him to Jesus. John iv. 26, Luke ii. 38, John i. Thus grace is communicative: it expands the heart, it calls forth the powers to action, it fills the soul with the purest benevolence, and makes its possessor truly concerned for the welfare of his fellow-creatures. He who has been convinced of the danger to which he was exposed, the astonishing love of Christ in rescuing him from it, the happy state into which he is brought by his unmerited favor, and the everlasting felicity he expects to enjoy, can not but be fired with the most generous desires that others may participate the same blessings. Who are cold hearted? Who are unfeeling? Who are unconcerned about the salvation of mankind, but those who have never seen the importance or experienced the happy effects of the blessings of the Gospel? But the experienced Christian is alive to their best interests; and his benevolence is not only of the best kind, but is of the most extensive nature. It is not a sect he wishes to flourish: it is not a party he desires to exalt. It is not a single neighborhood, his native place, or the country to which he belongs, he is anxious should enjoy these blessings only; but his good wishes encircle the globe, and with the Psalm-

ist he can say, "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and amen." Psalm lxii. 19. It is here, then, that we can account for what is improperly called the unnecessary activity of some Christians. To the world, indeed they appear as enthusiastics. They are considered as troublesome, intruding, and desirous of exalting themselves. They are often represented as characters, who, by an improper forwardness, dismember society, produce discord in families, and injure individuals. But these charges are groundless. The fact is, having tasted that the Lord is gracious themselves, they ardently long that others may know him too. They are grieved at the wickedness which abounds. They well know what enemies men are to themselves, and that the religion of Jesus only can produce true happiness. It is any wonder, therefore, if, stimulated by a sense of duty, and prompted by the feelings of compassion, they sometimes warn the sinner of his danger, endeavor to convince him of his folly, and point out to him the way of salvation? If a man who had long labored under a dreadful malady at last found relief in some able physician, would he be ashamed to speak of him?—rather would he not with the warmest emotions recommend him to others in the same situation? Or, if he had lost his way, and was kindly directed by one who was well acquainted with it, would he not recommend him as a sure guide? Or if any of us had received multiplied and unmerited favors from some kind and

beneficent friend, should we not speak highly of his character, and recommend him as the refuge of the needy, and the support of the distressed? Nor let it ever be wondered at, therefore, if Christians should so strongly recommend Him to whom they are entirely indebted for all the blessings they enjoy, and all the comforts they have ever received. Let not such zeal be accounted madness, such benevolence ostentation, nor such gratitude weakness; but rather the genuine evidences of a mind perceptive of duty, and a heart powerfully impressed with a sense of divine goodness.

But experience *actually qualifies* for usefulness. Who are our best philosophers, our best artists, our best legislators, our best divines, but those who have had the greatest experience? It is this which qualifies men for the discharge of the most important offices. To these are committed affairs of the greatest magnitude, and this with the greatest propriety. For how soon would that vessel be exposed to the most imminent danger which has an inexperienced pilot at the helm! How soon would that army be put into confusion who only had an inexperienced general at its head! How soon would that country be involved in ruin who possessed no other than an inexperienced statesman as her guide! But, on the contrary, where experience dictates, therein general safety is enjoyed. Let us apply this to the experienced Christian. How well qualified is he to be useful! with what certainty can he speak of the na-

ture of sin, with what feeling can he expatiate on the vanity of the world, with what propriety can he enlarge on the operations of the human heart! How capable is he of recommending the best things to attention! With a noble boldness, he can contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. With energy, he can exhibit the Saviour to the lost sinner, as his only righteousness. He can afford consolation to the distressed, instruct those who are ignorant, and be the instrument of restoring the wandering backslider to his happiness and his God. Thus even the private Christian is qualified for usefulness, and shines as a light in the world.

But how peculiarly useful is experience to him who is in a more public situation! What an advantage is it to the minister of the Gospel! It enables him to touch every tender string of the human heart, to adapt himself to the cases, trials, and feelings of his different auditors; to lift up them that fall, to comfort the feeble-minded, to sympathize with the afflicted, to bear with the weak, and succor the tempted. What a difference do we discern in the discourses of those who deliver merely what they have been taught, but what they do not feel! How cold is the address of the mere speculator and inexperienced, when compared with his which comes warm from the heart, and is the fruit of his own experience! How useless, flat, and insipid is the one, how animated, appropriate, and impressive is the other! The one resembles the mere way-post that

directs the stranger, while itself is unmoved; the other may be compared to a living guide, who actually becomes a companion in the road, and animates and supports as he proceeds.

From the views we have thus taken of the advantages of experience, we may learn what respect is due to it. How many evils would the young and inexperienced be saved from, were they to be obedient to the advice of those who have been long in the way! How many have to lament that they have followed their own inclinations, in preference to the wise counsels of the more experienced! Consult, therefore, my young readers, those of longer standing than yourselves. Be willing to give up your judgments to those which are superior. It is an honor to sit at their feet, and receive their instructions; but it is vanity to think you know so much, that they can not inform you. They have seen the world in the various appearances it has assumed. They have watched the operations of Providence. They have been out in the storm, and been tossed about by the dreadful tempest. They can tell where the dangerous places are: the rocks that are to be avoided, and the course which should be pursued. To them, therefore, under God, must you resort. They can direct in difficulty, support in danger, and be the instruments of saving from impending ruin. Learn to court their company, listen to their advice, and never be ashamed to own your inferiority, nor to bend to their decision.

Let the experienced, also, learn to make use of their experience for the good of others. It is with this as it is with every other valuable treasure—it ought to be employed for the benefit of society at large, or individuals in particular. To gain much and impart nothing, is disgraceful to humanity, and inconsistent with religion. A general relation of experience to every one would be highly injudicious. Pearls are not to be cast before swine. But there are occasions when the Christian may make use of his experience with great advantage, and be the happy mean of deterring from the prosecution of rash and dangerous steps; or, on the other hand, of encouraging others, whose minds have been perplexed with a variety of distressing fears. Experienced Christians, be useful in this respect. Tell what you know, that your younger brethren may be benefited. How pleasing it is to see you sit down with a little company of inexperienced around you, and to hear you say, "I have travelled some time in the way. In yonder place I was surrounded with enemies; but the interposition of providence rescued me from danger. As I passed along that valley, I found help from the recollection of the divine promises. In ascending the hill of difficulty, I was wearied and exhausted, but happily my strength was renewed. Sometimes I have been tempted to step aside to gather a flower that grew on the bank, but I have found it only impede my journey, and for a while lost sight of the path in

which I was going. The clouds have sometimes alarmed me, but they have ultimately caused me to mend my pace. Loiterers, speculatists, apostates, and others, have often wished to hold converse, and dispute about the road, but they are all to be avoided: they harass the mind, and lay stumbling-blocks in the way. I have beheld objects at a distance which have appeared terrific and dismaying; but, on a nearer approach, I have experienced them to be rather adding to the comfort of the way than otherwise. The nights have sometimes been long, and the winds and storms have been violent, but it has made the light and the calm more acceptable. On the whole it is pleasant to remark, that they who commit all into the hands of the Almighty, shall find all well in the end; that there is nothing to be dreaded so much as a deviation from the path of duty, and that little is to be feared while we are in it."

Such is the testimony that experience can bear to the faithfulness of God, and such testimony should be borne, for the sake of those who have to travel in the same road. Much might be said on this subject, but we must reserve it for another place in this work, where we shall consider it more at large, [see the 8th and 11th chapters.] But before we come to this part, it will be necessary, as we have now opened the nature and advantages of experience in general, to enter into *more particular* experiences of true Christians.

CHAPTER III.

THE YOUNG CHRISTIAN'S EXPERIENCE.

ALTHOUGH all true Christians belong to the same family, have the same common parent, are travelling the same way, and have the same object in view, yet they are not all of the same stature, possess the same strength, nor bear the same complexion. Hence it is that the sacred Scriptures speak of "little children, young men, and fathers in Christ." There are some who have but just begun to breathe in the spiritual world, and can scarcely discern spiritual objects; there are others who, in addition to life, possess vigor, who are grown up to manhood, have obtained more knowledge, and are still making progress to a higher state. But there are others who have arrived to considerable eminence in the divine life, whose judgments are matured, whose views of things are extensive, and who, by long experience, are capable of teaching others also. Thus we see it is in religion as in all the other works of the Divine hand. There is a gradual process to be observed. Every thing could be done instantaneously by the power of the Almighty, were it his

good pleasure. But we see it is otherwise. The work of creation was not executed in a day. The system of providence is not the work of a moment, and the still more grand work of redemption was not to be accomplished at once. If we turn also to the works of art, every thing that is grand and magnificent, beautiful and permanent, has been the work of time, deliberation, and a regular process. The stately buildings that astonish the beholder, the governments of the earth instituted for the happiness of its inhabitants, the volumes of learning and information that adorn our libraries, the curious machines formed for the convenience of man and the prosperity of commerce, all have been carried on in this way. So the most important of all blessings, the religion of Jesus, as to its operations on the human mind, is progressive. It may be argued, however, that regeneration is an instantaneous act; but, admitting that it is, and that spiritual life is communicated *at once*, yet that is no objection to the principle we are now contending for. Life is communicated to the child, but that does not constitute its manship. It does not immediately unfold all its powers, and arrive to maturity at the same instant. So in the family of Christ, life may be given, but the Christian may be a babe: he may be weak and ignorant, and it must be a work of time before he can advance to be a young man and a father in Christ.

To this agrees the language of the apostle Peter,

who says, "Ye also, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." 1 Peter ii. 2. So the apostle Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, says, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ." 1 Cor. iii. 1. So again to the Hebrews: "For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe." Heb. v. 13. So the treatment of the Thessalonians, which the same apostle speaks of, conveys the same idea: "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children." 1 Thess. ii. 7. It is this babe, this child in grace, then, whose experience we shall now consider. And here, also, we shall have to describe something of his character, as well as his experience; in both of which we shall see something *excellent*, something *blamable*, and something *discouraging*.

The first thing we discover in the young Christian is a serious concern for his soul. Before he was convinced of his real state by nature, he manifested no care for the immortal part. All taken up with his body, the pleasures of the world, and the vanities of time and sense, he neglected that which was most important, and despised that which was most necessary. But now he is led to consider what will become of his soul, and to make the solemn inquiry, "What shall I do to be saved?" He reads with trembling the awful warnings and solemn declarations of Scripture, "What shall it profit a man if he

gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Except ye repent ye must all perish. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." Mark viii. 36. Matt. xviii. 3. Luke xiii. 3. Isa. lv. 6. These passages come home with power to his mind; he is led to see the impropriety of living according to the course of this world, the end of which is death. The divine Spirit impresses the solemn truths of revelation upon his heart; he is made a new creature; old things begin to pass away, and all things become new. He is led to choose that better part, that one thing needful, which can not be taken from him. The care of the soul, the shortness of time, the certainty of death, the necessity of repentance, the awful realities of heaven and hell, together with the thoughts of eternity, are subjects which now so engage his attention, that he becomes alive to his best interests, sets his face Zionward, takes up his cross, and travels towards the heavenly world.

But although his feet be directed in a right path, he is far from being satisfied with himself. He can not forget the transgressions of his former life. There was a time when sin was not a source of distress to him, and when, indeed, he saw nothing of the evil of it. He would not then own himself a sinner, and ridiculed those whom he found depressed

in spirit, on account of their sins. Thinking nothing of the justice and holiness of God, and the demands and sentence of his law, he trifled with sin, and committed it without remorse. God, said he, is merciful, and there is no doubt of forgiveness. But now, when he looks back, he can not bear the reflection! His sins appear both multitudinous and aggravating. He wonders God did not cut him down in the midst of his folly. He remembers how he abused divine goodness, slighted conscience, neglected duty, and offended Him to whom he is under infinite obligations. Under a sense of this he now feels a heavy burden, often doubts whether the Lord will be gracious to him, and, like David, prays, "Oh! remember not against me former iniquities; let thy tender mercy speedily prevent me, for I am brought very low. Help me, O God of my salvation, for the glory of thy name; and deliver me, and purge away my sins, for thy name's sake." Psa. lxxix. 8, 9.

It may be necessary to observe here, that all Christians have not the same pungent feelings on their first convictions. Some are remarkably distressed under a view of their sins; others feel, but not to the same degree. A sense of guilt, however, more or less, belongs to all. Nor are those to be considered as truly regenerate who do not find sin to be a burden. Where there is life there will be feeling. A ponderous weight upon a dead person will not be felt; but upon one where there is life, whether the infant, or the aged, there will then be a

susceptibility. So with true Christians: whether babes in Christ, or fathers, sin will be burdensome.

"I know, I know (says the Christian) that I am a sinful creature; looking at what I once was, I tremble; and beholding myself as I now am, I am fearful. I will declare my iniquity, I will be sorry for my sin. I have nothing in myself but what is a source of shame: I can do nothing but what is imperfect. All I have, and all I am, is tainted with human infirmity. If a single perfect thought could save me, I have it not. To thee, O Lord, therefore, I must look for mercy. Interpose, or I am undone. Show compassion, or I must die! Die a sinner! Die miserable! Die without hope! Die to bear thy indignation, and to reap the fruits of my own sin! O Lord, save or I perish!"

While guilt thus presses hard, the Christian is led to inquire what hope, what confidence, he may indulge, where he can find rest for his troubled conscience: how he can obtain real happiness; whether there be salvation for such as he. Here, then, we see him employed in consulting the sacred oracles, and here it is, by divine assistance, he obtains relief. Here he finds that a Manasseh, a Saul, a Magdalen, a thief on the cross, were pardoned and received to glory. Here he learns that a fountain is opened for sin and uncleanness. Here he beholds promises which strengthen his faith, brighten his hope, and comfort his mind. With what pleasure he reads, then, that, "the blood of Christ cleanses from all

sin; that he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them; that this man receiveth sinners, yea, that it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that he came into the world to save sinners." 1 John i. 7, Zech. xiii. 1, Heb. vii. 25, Luke xv. 2, 1 Tim. i. 15.

These promises furnish matter for prayer, and a sense of duty as well as of privilege excites him to come to the throne of grace. He can not now live, as he has done, without supplication to his God. Ah! he remembers well how he has neglected this, and that he has acted more like the beasts of the field than as a rational being, accountable to his Maker. He remembers, too, how praying people were the butt of his ridicule, how disgusting their prayers were; and when in the house of God, how tedious the service, how irksome the devotion of others has been to him. Yea, probably, he recollects more: he calls to mind the time when he actually derided and persecuted the people of God; endeavored to disturb their devotions, to destroy their Bibles, and to make them miserable. But now what a pleasing change! Behold, he himself prays; happy to retire from those he once associated with, that he may implore the mercy of his God, and experience communion with him. Now the people whom he despised are the objects of his delight. He hastens to their company, he unites with them in their services, and participates with them the blessings

attendant on those who wait on God, and devote themselves to him.

It is not to be supposed, however, from what we have said above, that the young Christian is immediately possessed of the gift of prayer, so as to address his Maker with that freedom and propriety which belong to the more experienced Christian. There is much ignorance and imperfection. But we are not offended. He is a babe; and the lispings of a babe have charms, and make us feel as well as the more accurate language of the more mature. We admire the grace that dictates his desires, and we excuse the language in which they are clothed.

Another peculiar characteristic of the young Christian is zeal. We often discover more of this in him than in those who are more advanced. God perhaps graciously bestows much in order to break through the difficulties and withstand the great opposition to which he is exposed. The young Christian, too, it must be remembered, knows but little of the strength of human corruption, and the inveteracy of prejudice. He imagines he can easily reclaim those who have been long accustomed to vice and immorality. He sees things so plain himself, that he supposes others must see the same. Full of love to the Saviour, he would fain bring others to love him too. He sets about converting the world, and discovers much activity; till at last he finds what Melancthon found, that "Old Adam is too hard for the young Christian."

Here, then, we must consider the shades in his character; some imperfections, which nothing but a greater experience will remove. He has been but a short time in the way; his mind can not be much enlarged; his knowledge must be but scanty; his judgment respecting divine things can not be matured. The world lay snares for him of which he is not aware; the argument of a superior, the smile of a relation, the promise of a friend, and the suggestions of carnal prudence, sometimes lead him aside. Though sincerely engaged in the cause of his divine Master, he has not, altogether, entirely shaken off customs, and divested himself of prejudices he imbibed in nature's school. These have proved a thorn in his side, and given the world an opportunity of attacking him with hopes of success. He has had but few occasions, as yet, to witness the deceitful operations of his own heart. This is a book he has not been accustomed to read till lately. Many fine descriptions have been set forth here; many fine pictures have been drawn, and many delightful prospects represented, that have, after all, proved fallacious, and by which he has been deceived. His little acquaintance, also, with the sacred oracles has led him, sometimes, to put false constructions on the word of God; and he has been in danger of falling into error, had it not been that some who had more experience afforded him instruction. "The devices and depths of Satan," also, he has been but little acquainted with. This great enemy of souls has watched his every step, painted things

in improper colors, and sometimes put on a spiritual appearance: the young convert, perhaps, has listened to his insinuations, and, while pleased with the phantom presented to his mind, has actually fallen a victim to his snares. See the last chapter.

It is no uncommon thing for the inexperienced Christian, also, to discover a little of a self-dependent spirit. Legal hope dies hard, and he is sometimes led to imagine that he has more strength than he has. Thus Peter thought that though all the disciples should leave Christ, yet he would not. How many rash steps have been taken, how many dangers have young Christians run into, through a dependence on themselves! They have judged by their present feelings, not considering the weakness and versatility of man. "I shall never be moved, it is good to be here," has been their language. Their very prayers, although sincere and well-meaning, have proved their ignorance and self-dependence; and often has it been a mercy for them that they have not been answered according to their desires. Like children too, they have been pleased with toys; stood on the brink of danger, without knowing where they were. Flushed with zeal, they have made attempts without fear, entered upon important stations without caution, and engaged in services which the more experienced have declined from a sense of their importance, and the wise have withdrawn from, under a conviction of their inability.

It is the tendency of the religion of Jesus to hum-

ble the mind, and to produce the most lowly thoughts of ourselves; and in proportion as grace operates, so shall we be diffident of ourselves, and the more shall we exalt the Saviour. Satan, however, takes the advantage of the young convert, to make him think more highly of himself than he ought to think. It is no uncommon thing, therefore, to observe such assuming a degree of importance which does not belong to them; to dictate where they ought to learn; to be conspicuous where they ought to be obscure. A consideration of the evil propensity of the heart to this sin led the apostle to say, "Be not high-minded, but fear. Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. Let every man think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing, yet, as he ought to know." Rom. xi. 20, 1 Cor. x. 12, Rom. xii. 3, 1 Cor. viii. 2.

Great imprudence, however, marks the young Christian's conduct. Even the disciples of our Lord were not free from this. Firmly as they believed in the Messiah, and ready as they were to obey his commands, they sometimes discovered great rashness, as the following instances will testify. "It came to pass, when the time was come that Jesus should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. And sent messengers before his face; and they went and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jeru-

salem: and when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." So again, "John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him forbid him not; for he that is not against us, is for us." Luke ix. 49–56.

The little experience the young Christian has, sometimes leads him to be loquacious. He is ready to determine without judgment, and to speak without caution. An over inquisitiveness is too evident, and an unsanctified curiosity frequently predominates. "What shall this man do? said one: to whom our Lord replied, What is that to thee? follow thou me." "Lord, are there few that shall be saved?" said another. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate," said our Lord, "for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." John xxi. 22, Luke xiii. 23, 24.

Zeal in a good cause is certainly deserving of praise, and worthy of imitation; but that of the young Christian too often degenerates into temerity. His judgment is not matured enough to inform him, nor his prudence great enough to guide him always in what is to be done. Hence actions good in themselves are seen out of place; order is disturbed; the path of others is crossed, and confusion pro-

duced, all through inadvertency and want of experience. Young Christians have often wounded the spirits of others, though undesignedly; and too often, instead of promoting, they have injured the cause they meant to serve. Infidels have laughed, skeptics increased their doubts, and the ungodly hardened in their courses by some rash step they have taken, or unguarded word they have uttered.

We must not, however, be too severe on those whose inexperience claims our advice, and whose tenderness should engage our protection. Their faults may be numerous, but they are the faults of children; their experience little, but they are continually adding to their treasure. They are every day receiving shocks, which, instead of injuring, tend to settle them. They are constantly making experiments, from which knowledge is increased, and prudence learnt. They have their pleasures, but they have their difficulties too: and from these difficulties they learn experience, and obtain good. But these difficulties must be stated, in order that we may have a full view of their experience.

We have already mentioned the serious concern produced in the mind by a conviction of sin, and that in some this arises to the most pungent distress, almost bordering on despair. A view of the holiness of God, the nature of sin, his own unworthiness, and the punishment due to the guilty, fills the soul with horror, and these uneasy impressions are not always immediately removed. The Almighty is

sometimes pleased to wound deep, before he sends his Holy Spirit to lead the awakened mind to look to and derive comfort from the cross. Hence many, with Job, have said, "The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirits: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me."* Job vi. 4.

But in addition to these painful sensations, the young Christian meets with opposition from his former companions. One derides him as an enthusiast, another considers him as melancholy; a third ridicules him as singular, while a fourth sneers at him for changing his religion. Perhaps he may have ungodly parents, who are ready to deprive him of his patrimony, expel him from the house, or set him up as a laughing-stock to the rest of the family. Domestics may be suffered to treat him with contempt, and inferior branches of the house may pass by him with scorn. These things, though honorable to the Christian, yet are not pleasant to human nature; and we all know, that though grace affords support, yet it does not destroy the feelings.

But the young convert is not only attacked in this way; but when the world perceives that he is invulnerable here, another method is tried, and which indeed has been more dangerous than the other. Human nature loves to be soothed: soft words, alluring smiles, kind treatment, and fair pro-

* See chapter on distressing experience.

mises will do more to bend the mind than any other means that can be thought of. These are sometimes employed by the devotees of the world to warp the mind, and draw aside the young pilgrim. With apparent kindness at the head, follows a variety of other expedients to ensnare. Vice is extenuated; virtue is represented as not always rigid in her claims; occasional departures are allowable; there is no harm when it does not spring from principle. God never designed all the pleasures of the world to be abandoned: every one have their infirmities, and you may have yours. You may think of religion at another opportunity: it will be time enough when you come to die. With such like expedients is the young convert assaulted: and it must be confessed that when parents and connections are amiable in every other respect, the struggle between conscience and carnal prudence becomes severe indeed. Here the Christian trembles. His relatives claim his attention; God claims his conscience. The former call to pleasure, but the latter to duty. Discouraged and dejected, he scarcely knows what to do; till the recollection of the decision of the apostles, "We ought to obey God rather than men," liberates his mind. Acts v. 29.

Another source of discouragement is the conduct of professors themselves. From both the formal and the careless is the Christian often grieved. The formal cold-hearted professor, who enjoys nothing of the power of real religion himself, is frequently the

most forward to reproach those who do. Instead of encouraging the young, bearing with their infirmities, and admiring their vigorous zeal, how often is it we hear him say, "Ah! young person, you run too fast: religion is sober; it requires not such zeal: you should mind your worldly interest; God does not expect we should do every thing. The wisdom of this world is not altogether to be despised: religion is well in its place, but you need not burden yourself with it: God will accept the will for the deed." This has staggered the new-born Christian for a while, till again, recurring to the sacred volume, he finds such characters described as dangerous: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion; who are neither cold nor hot." Amos vi. 1, Rev. iii. 18.

The inconsistent characters of some also discourage him. It is no uncommon thing for the newly-awakened Christian to imagine that conversion is a transition from the world, where every thing is imperfect and sinful, to the Church, where every thing is pure and holy. On his first entrance into the religious world, therefore, he is not aware that counterfeits are to be found here as well as in every other part of human society. He is surprised to find the serpent in paradise; that a profession of religion is made use of by the hypocrite as a step to worldly advancement; that there can be splendid talents, a retentive memory, a fair and sanctimonious appearance, and a silver tongue, without grace.

Nothing, perhaps, distresses him more than to find his Lord and Master crucified in the house of his friends. He feels for *them*, he feels for *himself*, he feels for the *cause*. On turning, however, to his guide, he finds this is no new thing: the Bible points out to him such characters, and warns him to beware. "Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls, and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo! thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity." Ezek. xxxiii. 30, etc., Matt. vii. 21, 22.

There are also temptations peculiar to the young Christian which become exceedingly distressing. The lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, assault him with the greatest force.

Sometimes a spirit of volatility leads him astray. His passions are clamorous, his spirits flow briskly. He finds it difficult to maintain that solidity without gloom, and that cheerfulness without levity, which should ever distinguish the true Christian. The god of this world knows too, how to beguile those who have not any considerable degree of experience. He is continually watching for their halting, and is ever ready to inflate with pride, to excite a false zeal, to stimulate to acts of imprudence; or, on the other hand, to fill with shame, to promote an unbecoming diffidence, to depress the spirit, and insinuate hard things of God. Thus young Christians suffer from Satanic opposition, as well as from their own lively passions, and the allurements of a fascinating and deceitful world.

Lastly, what has a great influence on the mind in a way of discouragement are the errors and variety of opinions which abound. The Bible informs us of "the doctrines of men," "oppositions of science," "devices of Satan," "unlearned questions," "old wives' fables," all which are to be guarded against. The young Christian is staggered at the multiplicity of sentiments, the number of false teacher, and the contrariety of opinions he finds among the professors of religion. What also has had the appearance of truth, he has found to be error. And as error often lives next door to truth, he has mistaken one for the other, till the word of God, or the wisdom of a more experienced Christian has set him right. So

many are the bye roads, so specious the arguments of the erroneous, and so numerous the votaries of false doctrine, that his mind has been for a while distracted. One, perhaps, has reproached him as a legalist, another has told him his doctrines lead to licentiousness. Some have endeavored to draw him aside with soft and insinuating measures; others have pronounced him in a state of imminent danger, because he could not walk in their confined circle, or breathe their bigoted and contracted spirit. Ah! young Christian, how should the more experienced in Christ feel for you! Tossed up and down, assaulted by every rude hand, ridiculed by the world, and tempted by a malignant foe, how ought such to feel for you? Venerable fathers in Christ, ye who were once thus exposed, press the tender lambs to your bosom, screen them from the stormy blast, hide them under the covert of your own influence, and let it never be said that those who are discouraged by the world are left unprotected by the Church, and unassisted by those whose business it is, like the Saviour of sinners, to strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.

But, before I conclude this chapter, let me entreat the young Christian to cherish a principle of gratitude for the manifestation of divine goodness toward him. It is true you have not the light, the experience, the wide extended views, or the matured judgment of many around you; but you are in the way: God is your guide; he has enabled you to forsake

the world, and to take up your cross. What obligations are you under, then, to him! You especially, who are early devoting yourselves to him, how many evils will you escape, how many blessings you enjoy! To begin the morning of life with God, is the way to have a most prosperous day and a serene evening. You may, therefore, look forward with pleasure; and when arrived at the end of your journey, look back without dismay. In life, through life, at the close of life, and when time shall be no more, all shall be well with you. Be grateful for discriminating favor: how many of the young are ruining their constitutions, wasting their estates, prostituting their powers, and bringing inevitable destruction upon their souls, while you have been led by a gracious Friend to take a different course! Ah! you are called to peace, to holiness, to honor, to glory, while others are sinking into perdition. Will you not, then, be grateful?

Learn also to be docile and humble. Others, who have been long in the way, confess that they know but little; yea, the wise are complaining of their ignorance. And what then can you know? Freely acknowledge your ignorance, and be not above asking instruction from your superiors. Sit down at the feet of others, and you shall be saved from many unhappy circumstances which those have been involved in, who chose rather to follow the dictates of their own rashness and inexperience than the wise directions of the intelligent and experienced Christian.

Follow too the footsteps of the flock; beware of novelty and curiosity in divine things. There are meteors in the religious world as well as the natural; but he who follows them is likely to be led astray. The light of the sun, which is more steady, permanent, and useful, ought to be preferred to those lights which are only conspicuous because they are surrounded with darkness. Revelation must be your guide, and not the novel opinions and strange sentiments of those who love to be singular, and who show more pride than grace by differing from all others. Above all, implore the Spirit of grace, that you may still go forward, increasing in knowledge and grace even unto the end.

You are not without encourgement; yea, it is somewhat remarkable that a great number of promises are made to the weak and young of Christ's fold. He gave a special commission that his lambs should be fed. It was prophesied of him, that he would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, but that he should take the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom. Ministers are commanded to speak comfortably to them, and to treat them with the utmost tenderness. Is. xlii. 3, Is. xl. 11, Is. xxxv. 3, 4, Jo. xxi. 15.

Perhaps you may complain; you may be ready to say, "Ah! I have but little if any light. My mind is very contracted, my corruptions I find to be very powerful. The enemy I fear will be too much for me. I am ready to sink under a sense of my un-

worthiness. And what if I should prove an apostate at last? What if I should sin against light and knowledge, and, like Judas, betray him whom I profess to love, and thus plunge myself into misery!" Should this be your language, consider that the great Shepherd of his sheep has engaged to keep and guide safe through. "None," he hath said, "shall pluck them out of his hand." 1 Pet. i. 4. Your feeling thus is evidence of life, and life shall not be destroyed by a kind parent, though it may be scarcely discernable. Go forward, therefore; you shall have the prayers of the saints, the attendance of angels, and the compassion of God.

Let us all learn to bear with the infirmities, sympathize with the state, and direct the steps of the weak and feeble. They have too many discouragements of their own to have others thrown upon them by those who are engaged in the same cause and have the same object in view. The voice of nature says, treat the young with tenderness and care. The voice of reason joins, and says, the strong ought to help the weak: and the voice of Scripture loudly proclaims, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye; he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand." Rom. xiv. 1, 4.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN IN MIDDLE AGE.

It was observed by the great apostle Paul, that when he was a child, he spake as a child, he understood as a child, he thought as a child; but when he became a man, he put away childish things. 1 Cor. xiii. 11. This is not less true in a spiritual than in a literal sense. There are *childish things* belonging to the young Christian, which, though they claim our indulgence, yet are not pleasing, and which a Christian of riper years is taught to renounce. The frivolities of children are not practised by the middle aged, nor are their imaginations deceived, nor their judgment so easily imposed on, as those who have seen and known but little of human life and of Christian experience. As the Christian advances, the dignity of his character appears; and when he has passed the first stage of life, we may consider him as possessing wisdom and experience. He has now felt the consequence of listening to the dictates of ignorance or of vanity, and of following the many rash guides who have pretended to be his friends. He is now enabled to unite prudence with his zeal,

and deliberation with his knowledge. Humility, steadfastness, order, wisdom, and vigilance distinguish and adorn his character. He is no more a child, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine: his heart is established with grace. What Hosea predicted of Israel may be verified in his experience: "He grows as the lily, and casts forth his roots as Lebanon." Hos. xiv. 5, 6. There is not merely a beauty as in the lily, but strength as in the cedar. Storms can not easily shake him, being rooted and built up in Christ. Things called new, alluring, and wonderful strike not his senses with the same force as formerly. He does not run backward and forward agitated at every strange event, nor is he carried away by the stream of popular opinion. In fact, we now see the Christian in this state no longer as the babe, the novice, the curious, or the volatile. It is the man of nerve, of judgment, of discretion and dependence; one who has renounced his own will to follow the will of God, who makes the word of God his rule, and the glory of God his end; who has seen enough of the world to wean him from it, and so much of the divine favor, as to convince him there can be no happiness without it.

There are some particulars, however, which more especially belong to the Christian at this period of life, which we shall now consider.

And, first, we may observe, that it is a time of serious reflection as to what is past, and of solemn

thoughtfulness as to what is to come. Young Christians, like children, seldom think much. Alas! what carelessness and want of consideration are evident! These things, however, in some measure, are done away in middle age. Things of importance engage the attention; the powers are enlarged, experience is ripened, the judgment is informed, and wise reflections can not but enter into the mind. The Christian, at this time, stands upon an eminence, and looks, as it were, both ways. He looks back, and beholds the way through which he has travelled. He contemplates the difficulties he has encountered, the tempests he has been exposed to, and the dangers which have attended him. He calls to mind the various changes he has witnessed in human affairs. Friends he has seen turned into enemies, comforts into crosses, and the most promising appearances into disappointment and woe. The unexpected vicissitudes he has seen in nations, churches, families, and individuals, fill him with astonishment, while at the same time they teach him wisdom. His reflections, however, are not *all* of the gloomy cast. He has seen the humble exalted, the vigilant protected, the industrious crowned with success. He has observed with pleasure, the kind hand of the Father of mercies supplying the poor, blessing the afflicted, defending the weak, holding up the tempted, and directing the ignorant. With the psalmist he can say, that he has never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread; but that divine

wisdom has led them forth by a right way, that they might go to a city of habitation." Ps. xxxvii. 24, Ps. cvii. 7. Reader, what a noble sight is this, to behold the Christian, notwithstanding all the troubles of life, pronouncing this delightful sentence, "I have seen the end of the Lord, that he is very pitiful, and of tender mercy!" James v. 11.

But the Christian in middle age is thoughtful as to the future. He dreams not now of new and extraordinary scenes, of places where all care and trouble are to be excluded, of connections where no false friends or open enemies are to be found, of business where no exertion is necessary, or of power where no insubordination will manifest itself. Alas! how have we all been deceived in one or other of these respects in our first setting out, till more experience has undeceived us. The Christian of middle age, however, has seen the fallacy of all these things. From what he has experienced, he is led to believe that the future will, in many respects, resemble the past. He prepares for disappointment. His hopes run not high relative to this world's felicity. While there are the same corrupt dispositions in men, the same opposition from the god of this world, the same uncertainty as to all human affairs, he naturally expects to feel the shock which the convulsions of surrounding bodies may occasion. As a prudent man, however, he foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself. He does not willingly rush into danger, yet, if he be called to it, he buckles on his armor,

and endeavors to bear up, and act with fortitude and spirit in the conflict.

To the Christian in this period indeed, as well as to all others, the events of futurity are unknown; yet he can look forward with a degree of confidence and pleasure. He has travelled half his journey; and from the remembrance of the support he has received in days that are past, he gathers hope for the future. "I will commit myself," says he, "into the hands of the same faithful guide. I will remember the interposition of his providence. He did not abandon me to the world, as I deserved. He conquered my foes when they surrounded me. I called upon him in the day of trouble, he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. Why then should I doubt his love? Why should I despond, since he remains the same in his covenant, in his purpose, in his perfections, and in his promise? The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." Unbelief has indeed, sometimes asked, "Will the Lord cast off for ever, and will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" But faith has answered, "This is my infirmity: I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of

all thy works, and talk of thy doings." Ps. lxxvii. 7, etc., 1 Sam. xvii. 37.

But has the Christian then, in this period, nothing to try him, nothing to weaken his faith, or cool his ardor? We answer, he has. This is a time when he is more oppressed with care, more exposed to anxiety, than perhaps any other part of his life. It is now that he is immersed in business; surrounded perhaps with a family; the love of gain increasing; occasions offering to excite jealousy, ambition, and envy. "Here he is encountered by the violence of an enemy. There he is supplanted by the address of a rival. The pride of a superior insults him. The ingratitude of a friend provokes him. Animosities ruffle his temper. Suspicions poison his mind." These are the things which try the Christian, and render this part of his life in many respects painful. What reason has he often to complain, through the intrusion of these evils, of the earthliness of his mind, the deadness of his soul to God, the lukewarmness of his frame, and the little he does for the glory of God! "My soul cleaveth to the dust: quicken thou me, according to thy word. From the uttermost parts of the earth have I heard songs, even glory to the righteous; but I said, my leanness, my leanness, woe unto me" Ps. cxix. 25, Is. xxiv. 16.

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love:
Here's my heart—oh! take and seal it,
Seal it to thy courts above."

Our Lord well knew what the Christian would be exposed to at this period, and, therefore, he has left suitable cautions and exhortations, which all who are more particularly engaged in the concerns of this life ought to observe. "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life." Luke xxi. 34. For want of an attention to these salutary cautions, how many Christians have lost their spirituality, their zeal, and their usefulness for a time! Alas! what an awful eclipse has been produced by the world's intervening between the Christian and his spiritual Sun. How have many gone mourning to the grave through the cares of temporal things! Worldly wisdom, secular interest, commercial connections, and too much of the spirit of the times, have so much influenced some good men, at this period, as to draw them aside from the true path, to pursue objects, which, however pleasant to the eye of sense, alas! have only been calculated to injure the soul, and throw a damp on their exertions in the best of causes. But to return from this digression, notwithstanding the general temptations, cares, and anxieties of the Christian at this season, and sometimes the too fatal consequences befalling those who listen to the tempter, yet, on the whole, the Christian is gaining in experience; he is more sensible of his danger, more judicious, prudent, and dependent on his God. We do not see in him that levity of spirit that is too conspicuous in the young:

not that he is without cheerfulness; "but his cheerfulness is as different from the levity of the young, as the flight of the eagle is from the fluttering of a sparrow in the air." There is now a solidity that marks his character, and this solidity is tempered with a humble joy. He is not now so easily elated nor so quickly depressed as formerly. There is an equanimity of mind, learnt from a proper view of all things being under the control and disposal of Him, who orders every thing after the counsel of his own will. There is a fortitude acquired by actual conflicts with and conquests over the enemy. There is prudence derived from the recollection of former inexperience. The senses, as the apostle Paul observes, by reason of use, can now discern both good and evil. Heb. v. 14.

Farther: we may consider this period as a time of usefulness. It is now that the Christian possesses wisdom to instruct, experience which claims veneration, and influence which gains attention. In the early period of Christian experience, the Christian indeed is often filled with extraordinary desires for doing good; but then, it often happens that he is destitute of that knowledge and prudence which should direct his exertions, and hence frequently does harm instead of good; but when he arrives to middle age, he is better capable of discerning what is to be done, and the best means which should be employed to answer the end. Having had some experience in divine things, and been of some standing

in the divine life, his knowledge becomes sound and extensive. The deceitfulness of the heart, the vanity of the world, the evil of sin, the temptations of Satan, are subjects with which he is well acquainted. So likewise the doctrines of Christ, the graces of the Spirit, the duties of Christianity, and the consolations of religion, are things on which he can delightfully expatiate. Now it is, therefore, that he becomes a shining light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, capable of illuminating the ignorant, reänimating the drooping, and strengthening the weak.

Experience excites veneration; hence it is that the Christian who has passed his novitiate, and is arrived to the period we are now speaking of, is generally resorted to as a source of instruction, and as an object of esteem. We can take his decisions without hesitation, and follow his directions without fear. To him, therefore, the distressed repair for advice under the difficult circumstances of life; the young for knowledge and direction, the conscientious for the resolving of cases of conscience, and the persecuted for a refuge in times of opposition and reproach.

It is now also that the Christian possesses more influence, and has greater opportunities presented to him of doing good. Now perhaps he is a father, and is anxious to bring his children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. He feels for their souls; he is concerned for their best interests. He

takes them in the arms of faith and prayer to the throne of grace, and beseeches the Father of mercies to be gracious to them. He tenders suitable instructions, and enforces all by a holy example. It is now, perhaps, he is a master, and has servants under his care. He is desirous of their being instructed in the way of salvation: he affords them opportunities of reading the Scriptures and hearing the Gospel. Taught by the humble and mild spirit of Christianity, he looks upon them as possessing souls equally as valuable as those of higher classes. He prays for them, and embraces every opportunity of doing them good.

Perhaps he fills important stations in society, where a wider range is afforded for the display of his benevolence, and where it is expected his activity and exertions must be redoubled. What are now his feelings, and what his language? Is it not now we hear him making inquiries of an important and useful nature? "Arrived at middle age, and holding responsible situations in life, what am I doing? The season of youth and inexperience is past away. Now, while I possess strength and opportunity, while my powers are alive, and my influence extensive, what useful objects have I in view? Do I discharge the duties which devolve upon me with vigor and propriety? and am I ready to adopt and willing to execute plans of utility and good? Should not my time, my talents, my property be devoted to the glory of God and the benefit of my

fellow creatures? And seeing that time is short, life uncertain, and that I must shortly descend to the grave, should I not work while it is day?" Thus we may consider the Christian at this season as stimulated to activity, desirous of doing good, and having it in his power, more than in the season of youth or the time of old age, to be useful to mankind.

But this is not a season of usefulness only as it respects others, but of peculiar gratitude as it respects himself. In the course of his journey, what has he seen? How many has he beheld ruined by others; how many ruined by themselves; how many deceived by the world; how many that have been exposed to accidents, losses, bereavements, and trials, while he has been preserved; how many pining under sickness, while he has enjoyed his health; how many groaning under the iron hand of poverty, while he has been liberally supplied; how many sinking under a blasted reputation, while his character has been kept unsullied; and how many have fallen into eternity since he began his course! "Ah! how many blank spaces he can number in the catalogue of those who were once his companions." These things can not be recollected without grateful emotions: he acknowledges the divine hand in his protection and support, and thus addresses the God of his mercies: "Father of all goodness, Source of all happiness, what obligations am I under to thee for thy continual care! Thou art the God of my life

and the length of my days. Thou hast granted me life and favor, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit. It was by thy grace I was first directed into the happy path; by thy wisdom I have hitherto been guided through all the various changes and manifold difficulties of my past life: to thee I owe the peace of my conscience, the reputation of my character, the supplies of my table, and the enjoyment of my health; from thee it is I have derived all the knowledge I have, the comfort I enjoy, and the sweet hope of that glorious immortality promised to them that love thee; by thee it is I have been upheld in slippery paths, preserved in dangerous moments, directed in trying circumstances, and supplied in times of need: to thee, therefore, O my God and Saviour, be all the praise. I will bless thee at all times; thy praise shall constantly be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord. My tongue shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long."

"Thy grace shall dwell upon my heart,
And shed its fragrance there;
The noblest balm of all its wounds,
And cordial of its care.

I'll speak the honors of thy name
With my last lab'ring breath,
And, dying, clasp thee in my arms,
The antidote of death."

Lastly, from what the Christian has seen of the mutability of all things here, and the faithfulness of

his God, he is led to trust more in him. He is conscious that all things are under the guidance of his providence, and that he alone can give wisdom profitable to direct. He reads with delight such passages as these: "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee, and thou shalt glorify me. Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you." Ps. i. 15, Prov. iii. 5, 6, 1 Pet. v. 5. He has seen the vanity of placing confidence in earthly things. He has been disappointed by his own heart, wounded by the world, deceived by flattering appearances, and injured by trusting to an arm of flesh. He learns therefore the necessity, finds the safety, and enjoys the comfort of depending on Him who is without variableness, or the least shadow of a turning. The remembrance, too, of the divine conduct towards him in days that are past inspires his confidence. God has conducted him through the dreary valley, enabled him to climb the lofty mountain, kept him from sinking in the deep river, abated the storm or sheltered him from its violence. His wants have been supplied, his steps directed, his enemies conquered, his trials sanctified, and his soul encouraged to go forward. It is with pleasure, therefore, he can sing, "The Lord is my Shepherd: I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil: my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." Ps. xxiii.

Thus we see the Christian at middle age, notwithstanding those anxieties and cares which attend him in that part of life; possessing serious reflections as to the past, and becoming thoughts as to the future; bearing testimony to the Lord's benignity and care towards him, increasing in judgment and prudence, deliberate in his determinations, steady in his work, useful in his situation, grateful for the innumerable benefits conferred upon him, and desirous of giving up himself to the all-wise disposal of his sovereign Lord.

Our business in this little volume is rather to portray the experience, than to point out the duties of the Christian; as this work, however, may fall into the hands of some professors who are busily engaged in the concerns of life, a suitable caution may not be unnecessary. We would say to them, Beware of inordinate love to the world. The cares of this life ensnare the mind, entangle the affections, draw the heart from God, and leave but little time

for devotion and improvement. Worldly care and the spirit of religion can not dwell together; they are too contrary principles: there is no such thing as associating such opposite sentiments. Fire and water, light and darkness, heat and cold, can not be incorporated. How cautious, therefore, should we be, especially too when we see so many injured and ruined through a fatal connection with the world, and an anxious pursuit of its interests! Lot's wife looked back, but she was turned into a pillar of salt. Esau sold his birth-right for a morsel of meat; but he was rejected, and found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. Judas betrayed his Master for thirty pieces of silver; but, alas! existence became a burden to him, and he went and hanged himself. These are awful monuments of the Divine displeasure towards those who were carried away with the love of the world. We can not then be too watchful, lest, whilst managing the concerns of business, the interest of our families, and pursuing the avocations of life, we should be swallowed up by a love of worldly interest. Reader, if you are called to busy scenes, and to take upon you the cares of temporal things, endeavor to maintain a vigilant spirit: retreat now and then from the hum of business "into the salutary shade consecrated to devotion and to wisdom." Providence, perhaps, may have called

you to *serve;* but beware of being cumbered with *much serving.* It is not activity, diligence, and attention we are here proscribing, but it is a too anxious spirit, a cleaving to the dust, a covetous disposition, a worldly mind, against which we would guard you. "For they that *will* be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the *love* of money is the root of all evil, which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. "The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful." Mark iv. 19.

Let me recommend to you to be found much in prayer. By this mean you will be preserved from the evil of the world, while you are in it: you will carry a savor of divine things into your business; it will sweeten toil, and alleviate care. Now if ever, indeed, while surrounded with those things that have a tendency to wean the soul from God, is prayer necessary. Without grace from above, your danger will be great; but by committing yourself to Him, who alone is able to keep you from falling, you will stand secure. Your prayers must be adapted to your circumstances; but few prayers will be more suitable in your situation than that of Agur: "Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient

for me. Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

Reader, are you in the flower of life?—study to be useful: now you have health, strength, influence, and opportunity, be active for God, and the benefit of mankind. Let not this period be wholly engrossed with the cares of the world. Work while it is day. Let it not be said of you, that you are a blank in creation; that you have talents, but they are hidden; property, but it is withheld; opportunity, but it is neglected. Oh! what a sad thing should this be your epitaph: "Here lies one who never did any thing for God, for the Church, or for mankind!" And yet of how many may this be said, and of how many professors too! The first part of life is lost in insignificant pursuits; the middle part is spent in anxious concerns about temporal things; and the last is burdened with complaints and infirmities. Reader, is the morning of life past with you? Recollect how soon it will be evening; how soon darkness and death will come upon you; how soon all opportunities will be gone to return no more. Be assured, when death draws near, you will not have to lament that you have done too much; rather you will regret the seasons that have been lost, privileges undervalued, mercies slighted, and time misimproved. Oh! how miserable to pass away a life of inactivity and nothingness; and how dreadful to be under the reflection that nothing has been done to promote the glory of God, or add to the

happiness of mankind! May divine grace, dear reader, enable you to live, and to work for God, that you may be saved from such a reflection as this; and at last hear the happy sentence pronounced, "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

CHAPTER V.

DISTRESSING EXPERIENCE.

WHAT was said of the children of Israel, that they were much discouraged because of the way, may with great propriety be applied to many Christians, while travelling through this vale of tears. It is true the Israelites were under the peculiar direction of the Almighty; he was their Governor, Benefactor, and Guide; yet they were exposed to a variety of difficulties and trials. Thus too it is with his people now: they are the objects of his love, directed by his grace, held by his hand, and supplied by his bounty; yet they are not exempt from discouragements. Many, it is said, are the affections of the righteous, and through great tribulation they enter into the kingdom. What, then, it may be asked, is the service in which they are engaged hard and intolerable? Is the cause in which they have embarked evil? Is the the master whom they serve despotic and tyrannical? Or is the object which they have in view insufficient to animate their hopes, and so important as not to produce encouragement? We answer No. On the contrary, the system in which they believe, and the

prospect they have before them, are every way calculated to inspire their hopes, to remove their fears, and excite their confidence. But man is a feeble creature; nor does his conversion render him an angel. He is subject to many fears, attended with many infirmities; and though even walking in the right road, too often, alas! has reason to mourn over his deviations and follies. It may be observed, however, on the whole, that his sorrow arises not from the principles he holds, or the end he has in view, but from a sense of his defects. It is a supposition of the want of religion, and not the possession of it, as too many imagine, that causes him to mourn. Not but outward calamities, and the common afflictions of life, are felt by him as well as others; for though grace makes the Christian, it does not unmake the man: he has the common feelings of humanity, though aspiring after the fortitude of the saint. These troubles are not, however, the chief sources of his grief, though they tend to accumulate it. Did he possess all that lively exercise of faith, that ardent love, deep humility, calm resignation, holy zeal, and constant gratitude, which he wishes, outward things would not much affect him: his spiritual foes would gain but little advantage, and his joy would be but seldom interrupted. But, alas! the best of men have at times to lament the want of these: hence their souls refuse comfort; and in proportion as they possess sincere regard for their God, they feel unhappy in any departures from his laws. Nor is the present state of things

calculated to cherish these divine principles. The world is polluted, and the streams of depravity flow in all directions. Those whose dispositions are still congenial with this corruption, feel no conflict, no disgust, no trial; but those who have participated of the divine nature, who are breathing after holiness, feel the opposition, and lament its baneful effects. Hence our Saviour's words are verified in this as in many other respects: "In the world ye shall have tribulation."

It is to be observed, also, that this is not peculiar to a few. It is too common for distressed Christians to imagine that their case is singular: but no; for though there may be some who do not feel the same pungent sorrow as others, yet at one time or other they all are discouraged. No, disconsolate Christian: think not that you are alone. Thousands have been, and thousands now are, exposed to as painful exercises as you. Were you but better acquainted with them, you would find that their experience in a great measure resembles yours: and could you but ask the spirits of the just made perfect above, they would tell you that there were seasons in which they bore the same conflicts, and were filled with the same despondencies as you.

"Once they were mourning here below,
And wet their couch with tears:
They wrestled hard, as we do now,
With sins, and doubts, and fears."

But reason asks, Why, why does the sovereign Lord and Controller of all events suffer these things? Does he not possess infinite love to his people? And is not love productive of everything that is delightful where power is not wanting? To which it may be answered, That the wisdom of God hath so constituted it, and that, no doubt, to answer the most valuable ends. Nor can his goodness be impeached, since our very trials endear him to us, wean from the world, produce humility, excite dependence, and make us long for that happy state where all shall be unfolded, and we shall clearly see that all things have worked together for our good.

But let us now proceed to consider those circumstances which more particularly enter into the distressing experience of the Christian. And, first, we may observe, that a deep view of his own unworthiness often discourages him. Convinced of the holiness of God's law, and of the purity of the divine nature, he mourns over the little conformity he finds to the divine image. Observing the pride, the vanity, the indifference, the treachery and unbelief of his heart, he trembles before God. Other enemies are around him, waiting an opportunity for an attack; but this is within him, continually harassing and distressing him. Its secret intrigues, its various windings and turnings, its mutability and vileness, its readiness to coalesce with every surrounding object, its evasive shifts, its artifice and cunning, its infidelity and hypocrisy, with a long train of other

abominations, all tend to depress the mind, weaken the faith, and damp the joy of the Christian. O, how do these corruptions cause him to drag on heavily! how do they deprive him of comfort, spoil his duties, and render him a burden to himself! Perhaps no outward troubles ever become such a source of distress as this. His reproaches, afflictions, losses, and bereavements, may be sanctified; he may be greatly supported under them, yea, his greatest faith, patience, resignation, and fortitude, may be displayed in them. Say, Christian, what is it that grieves thee most. Is it thy poverty; the indignity thrown upon thee for Christ's sake; the loss of worldly goods; or the deprivation of health and of earthly joys? No; it is the risings of corruption; the coldness, the little spirituality of thy heart; the strange backwardness, at times, to engage in the best of services; the vile thoughts, the dull affections towards God. It is these things that cause him to hang down his head. The apostle Paul could glory in infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses for Christ's sake; but when he comes to behold himself, and to observe the depravity of his own heart, he declares himself to be wretched, and the least of all God's saints. It is this that causes many to doubt of their interest in the divine favor. "Can I," saith the convinced soul, "can I be an object of divine love? Can I, who have nothing but vileness and sin, be a subject of grace? Where is that holy confidence in God, that patience of hope,

that ardor of love, that characterize the true believer? Were I a Christian, should I not oftener enjoy communion with God, watch against the world, and discover more zeal in his cause? Ah, me! what inactivity marks my steps; what feeble desires, what secret backslidings! And though I hate sin, yet, alas! how ready to listen to the tempter! how ready to give way to a busy imagination; ever painting things different to what they are! Alas! how can I approach his throne, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity! How can I associate with his people, when I myself am so unlike them! How can I visit his house to worship him, when my heart wanders from him"

Thus the Christian sometimes mourns, and, forgetting that all these feelings are the result of light and of grace, writes bitter things against himself. "Thine arrows stick fast in me; mine iniquities have gone over my head: as an heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly: I go mourning all the day long. I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me." Psalm xxxviii. And what is the cause? "For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that I do. The good that I would, I do not; but the evil I would not, that I do. When I would do good, evil is present with me. It is true, I delight in the law of God, after the inward man, but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my

mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am!" Rom. vii.

The insinuations of Satan become another source of distress. That there is such a being the Scripture gives us every reason to believe (Matt. ii. 29, Eph. ii. 2, John xii. 31, 2 Cor. iv. 4), although many deny his existence, and endeavor to explain away the effects of his agency, by attributing them to vision, a deluded imagination, or a weak mind. This being is an enemy of the human race at large, but more especially malignant against them who bear the divine image. When the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan also came among them. Job i. 6. Satan hath desired to have thee, saith our Lord, that he may sift thee as wheat. Luke xxii. 31. Be sober, be vigilant, saith the apostle, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. 1 Peter v. 8. There is no doubt but many easily persuade themselves, that every evil that arises, every temptation that is proposed, comes from this quarter; but whatever extreme such may run into, it is evident that the forementioned passages imply that much opposition must be expected from this great enemy. Those, indeed, who are wholly under his influence feel no struggle—they are voluntarily going the way he would have them; but those who are travelling a contrary road continually experience his attacks. How often does he insinuate that there

is no God; no future state of rewards and punishments; no truth in the sacred volume; that religion is unnecessary, and that there can be no harm in the gratification of our passions! Or, if there be a God, that he is too great to take notice of the affairs of mortals, too merciful to punish their infirmities, and too compassionate to require of them uniform obedience. Or, allowing that God calls for sincerity of heart, devout worship, and unreserved affection, yet how ready is he to insinuate that the Christian has no interest in his favor; that his sins are too great to be pardoned; that all his past experience has been nothing but the effect of his own imagination; that he has been deceiving himself; that he is guilty of presumption; that, after all his profession, he will be cast away from the divine presence, and abandoned to everlasting misery and woe! How has he brought past sins to remembrance, accused of neglect, ingratitude, and disobedience; yea, how has he pleaded the infirmities of human nature, and especially those which have taken place since the Christian first made a profession, in order to make him believe that he is only a hypocrite; yea, he has sometimes insinuated that he has committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, which has filled the mind for a season with the greatest distress. Thus wearied with the continual assault of this great adversary, how discouraged and perplexed has the Christian been! and were it not for the supplies of grace and strength from on high, how often would his foot

have slipped, and his soul been plunged into all the horrors of guilt and despair!

This great enemy, also, greatly harasses the Christian by his vigilance, restless activity, and cunning. He knows how to suit his temptations to the various circumstances, sentiments, and feelings of mankind. He has temptations for the eye, the ear, the taste; yea, all the senses of man. We may change our situation, alter our condition, and remove into a different sphere; but behold, he is there also. He has temptations suitable to youth, to age; to opulence, to poverty; to retirement, to society; to ignorance, to knowledge; yea, to every object, every circumstance, and every place. Nothing of a prosperous nature, but what he is ready to turn into a snare; nothing of a discouraging kind, but what he is busy to convert into a source of discontent. Thus he is ever active to spoil, disturb, confuse, and, where he can, to destroy. How much does a good man, notwithstanding all his vigilance, suffer from this foe of God and of man! How often is he wounded in the conflict! and though the God of his salvation has determined his final happiness in the end, how frequently is it interrupted in the way!

The Scriptures assure us also that he transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. xi. 14), and here again the believer suffers. He not only deceives mere professors, by putting them upon plans of activity, of zeal, and of religion, while nothing but self is at the bottom, and nothing but error and

inconsistency the consequence; but he would fain make the true believer suppose that his pride is nothing but a proper dignity, or his humility unnecessary abasement; that his natural courage is a Christian fortitude, or that his temerity is a becoming fear. In innumerable instances of this kind is he attacked; often is he injured, and loses much of his comfort through the wiles and stratagems, devices and cunning artifices of this deceiver of mankind. What necessity does the Christian find here for ardent prayer, perpetual watchfulness, and entire dependence on a superior Power, lest he fall a continual victim to his insidious snares and cunning machinations!

As the Christian is exposed to opposition from the god of this world, so of course he can not fail to be discouraged by his emissaries. He stirs up the ungodly to slander, misrepresent, and persecute. Hence what distress have Christians been involved in through the malice and enmity of wicked men! Who can read the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews without the deepest emotions of sorrow? "They were tortured, not accepting of deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Others had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings; yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep skins, and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented: they wandered in deserts, and in moun-

tains, and in dens and caves of the earth." And since the apostle's day what dreadful accounts does history afford of the cruelties exercised towards the righteous! Alas! what houses ravaged, what property confiscated, what sanguinary methods adopted, what multitudes insulted, racked, banished, imprisoned, burnt, drowned, starved, or otherwise destroyed! It is true every age has not witnessed the same bloody scenes, the same excess of violence, the same horrid tortures; but as true Christians are the same in every age, the world has been against them; and if milder laws have been adopted for the protection of their persons, and free toleration given for the ease of their consciences, yet their sentiments have not been less hated by, or their persons less obnoxious to, the wicked. As long, also, as Christianity inculcates faithfulness and sincerity, purity and devotion, and as long as the heart of man retains its natural enmity against God, must we expect this opposition from them in a greater or less degree. Our conscientiousness will be construed into affected singularity, our solitude termed monkishness, our zeal denominated forwardness, our experience enthusiasm, our patience apathy, and our devotion hypocrisy. Say, Christian, however circumspectly you have acted, whether these have not been some of the charges alleged against you by the devotees of this world. Their cold looks, their bitter speeches, their indifferent conduct towards you, have fully convinced you that the spirit is the

same, and fully explains the words of our Lord: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." John xv. 19.

But a good man's opposition does not arise solely from the openly profane. There are those who pretend to be going the same road; but, alas! from ignorance, from bigotry, from prejudices, from enthusiasm, or from hatred to vital Christianity, often dishearten and perplex: some injure his mind, by boasting of their fancied righteousness; others make him tremble, by turning liberty into licentiousness; some are ready to pour anathemas on his head, because he can not believe with them; others treat him as a weak brother, because he is not always talking of the mysterious doctrines and eternal purposes of Jehovah; while others, again, are ready to unchristianize him, because he has seen the propriety of tempering his zeal with knowledge, and prefers cool deliberations to rash decisions. But of all things what distresses him most, is to see the once flaming professor become an apostate, and turning back again to the world, and to his former courses. O, how does the Christian feel for the cause! How is religion dishonored, his divine Master neglected, and privileges abused, by such a conduct! How do the enemies of truth triumph, and what fresh occasion is given for their insult and contempt! Apostates seldom return silent; they come back tenfold

more the children of the devil than ever they were before. They are generally filled with the deepest malignity; they give a bad report of the land, and as they return, they use their utmost influence to turn others back too. The world is ready to listen to their misrepresentations, and thus their prejudice is increased. Young professors are struck dumb. Those who before were indifferent, now renounce all pretensions, while the hypocrite is encouraged in his dissimulation, and the ungodly hardened in his sins. O Christian, what sensations are yours while beholding these awful consequences of wilful apostacy! What tears do you shed! what sorrow do you experience, while witnessing your Saviour crucified afresh, and put to an open shame! Heb. vi. 6. Thus, when the Lord said of Saul that he turned back from following him, and had not kept his commandments, it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the Lord all night. 1 Sam. xv. 11. Thus Jeremiah mourns, "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night, because they have *forsaken* the law which the Lord set before them." Jer. ix. 1, 13. Thus Paul laments that Demas had forsaken him, having loved this present evil world. 1 Tim. iv. 10.

But while the Christian is thus concerned, his distress is increased by remembering that he, too, is in the flesh, and consequently exposed to danger. Here again he suffers, and is dejected: how often have we heard him say, "Alas! I, too, also may fall.

Who can tell? Perhaps I may one day be overcome by the allurements of the world, the violence of my own corruptions, or the temptations of Satan. Perhaps I may be permitted to commit some gross sin, and thus bring dishonor on my profession. I feel an evil heart of unbelief ready to start aside. Ah! the evil day may come, in which I may be pointed to as the wretched apostate, and avoided as the base traitor, who has again crucified his Lord!" Thus the Christian, overwhelmed with fears, has trembled lest he should offend his God, and injure that cause in which he is earnestly and sincerely engaged.

But it may be asked, Are not these fears sometimes realized? Do not real Christians themselves fall? We answer, Yes. And here we come to the most painful part of his experience. Some, indeed, are happily kept, but others have been suffered to wander from the path of duty for a season. Moses, the meekest of men, was guilty of rashness; Samson, the strongest of men, showed his weakness; David, the holiest of men, manifested depravity; and Peter, the most zealous of men, evidenced his cowardice. But do believers live in a course of transgression? do they return no more? are they hardened in their sin? do they feel no compunction of heart for their conduct? Unhappy men! their misery is extreme. What horrors of conscience, what bitter reflections, what a hell do they feel, till restored again to the path of duty and the enjoyment of the divine presence! "The true penitent," cries the

backsliding Christian, "the true penitent, who never before made any profession of religion, penetrated with a sense of his unworthiness, confessing his sins, and returning with anxious desire to his heavenly Father's bosom, may indulge the pleasing thought of being received and accepted; but how can I, who have sinned against light, abused mercy, and grieved the Holy Spirit, expect to be an object of divine favor? How can I, who have violated reason forgotten my obligations, neglected my privileges, and broke through all the restraints of kindness, how can I appear with any degree of confidence at the sacred throne? How can I, whose steps have deviated from the path of duty, who have listened to the voice of worldly charms, and been deaf to the remonstrances of conscience and of truth, enter into the divine presence with the least hope of mercy? Ah! wretched delinquent! miserable man! where shall I fly? Where shall I hide my blushing face? What power can relieve me now? What worldly good can be a substitute for the loss of that peace I once enjoyed? Thus the backslider bemoans himself, and, filled with distress, he knows not what to do, where to go, or how to act. Misery is painted in his countenance, fear seizes his soul, while guilt presses on him as an intolerable load. Under such feelings, and in such circumstances as these, it was that David exclaimed, "I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I

shall be whiter than snow. Hide thy face from mine iniquities, and blot out all my sins." Thus Jonah: "Out of the belly of hell cried I. I said, I am cast out of thy sight. My soul fainted within me." Thus of Peter, too, it is said, that "he went out and wept bitterly." Ps. li., Jon. ii., Matt. xxvi.

But it is not open transgression only that affects the Christian. Many have reason to be thankful they have been preserved from this; but there are secret backslidings, the wanderings of the thoughts, and the coldness of the affections, that prove occasions of great distress to a tender conscience. He would fain imbibe the lovely spirit and imitate the noble example of his Saviour; "but alas!" says he, "my best hours are not free from sinful infirmities, nor my best duties from sinful imperfections. These, like a worm at the root, eat away the vigor of my graces, and tarnish the beauty of my services. O, such swarms of unruly and irregular desires! When, O, when shall they all be brought into subjection! Lord, when I engage in any spiritual duty or heavenly exercise; when I draw near to thee, and promise myself some sweet converse and communion with thee, yea, even then, this evil is present with me! O, if I were but rid of it in these hours, what a mercy should I esteem it, though I were troubled with it at other times! Could I be but free from it in the seasons of duty, on Sabbaths, and sacramental occasions, what a comfort would it be! But, alas! sin is most active and busy in such seasons; it takes

off my heart from duty, it interrupts all my thoughts, and carries off my soul from my beloved. So that even the good motions which come from the Spirit of God are either interrupted or mingled with some evil tendencies. No sooner do I attempt to do anything for God and his glory, but I find something presented, either of self-love or vain glory; hypocrisy or unbelief will be springing up, either to distress my soul, to prevent or spoil all my services. Lord, I come hither to meet with thee, I come to obtain fresh strength against sin, and yet it seems to bear down all before it. I come for light, but behold darkness; for comfort, but behold trouble. Once I thought I had little to do but to triumph over all my corruptions, slain, as I then hoped, by the power and grace of Christ. My heart and affections began to warm and melt in duty; my soul seemed to get near to God; but alas! how different is it now with me! sin seems more powerful than ever. O, what reason, then, have I to complain with the apostle, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me!" (See Dr. Stafford on the vii. ch. Rom., Ser. xx., p. 383.)

Another source of distress to the Christian is the hiding of God's face. This is a sore trial, as we may find from the language of those who have experienced it. "O," says Job, "that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I can not perceive him. On the left hand,

where he doth work, but I can not behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I can not see him." "Lord," says David, "why castest thou off my soul? Why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die: while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted." "He hath led me," says Jeremiah, "and brought me into darkness, but not into light. Surely against me he is turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. He hath hedged me about, that I can not get out; he hath made my chains heavy." So Zion complains, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." Job. xxiii., Ps. lxxxviii. 15., Lam. iii. 1, etc., Is. xlix. 14.

Ah! what does the Christian feel in this unhappy situation! All the beauties of creation, the blessings of Providence, the smiles of the creature, or the wonders of art, can not fill up that aching void which he now experiences. In proportion as he loves his God, so he feels his distress arise when deprived of the light of his countenance. As thousands of inferior luminaries could not supply the place of the sun, so he finds that all the inferior joys of the present state can not be a substitute for the glorious Sun of Righteousness. Existence itself becomes a burden; everything is insipid. His soul refuses comfort; ministers, ordinances, sabbaths, yea, even the promises themselves, afford him no consolation. He walks in darkness, and has no light. Now it is, too, he begins to doubt whether he ever knew the truth, and felt its

power. He is almost ready to imagine that God is about to give him up to the horrors of a guilty conscience. The monuments of divine justice are brought to his view: he trembles at the recollection of an Achan, a Saul, a Judas. He reads those passages of Scripture which say, "I also will choose their delusion, and will bring their fears upon them. This shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow. They shall call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. I will laugh at their calamity, I will mock when their fear cometh." Is. i. 11, Prov. i. 23, etc. These scriptures he is ready to apply to himself, and sometimes such has been the greatness of his distress, that, with a busy imagination and a gloomy mind, every circumstance has been converted into an occasion of grief. If a threatening be pronounced from the pulpit, he thinks it against him. If a friend inadvertently drop an unpleasant word, he conceives that is sent by Providence as a testimony against him. If affliction seizes him, he imagines it is the wrath of God poured out upon him. If even he meet but with a look of indifference from any of the saints, he construes it to their contempt of him, and that God thus suffers it for his punishment. Thus the Christian sometimes thinks all things are against him. Yet however, notwithstanding all, he can not go back; he dare not give up: he struggles and longs for deliverance; nor can he be satisfied until the Lord appear, and the Spirit bear witness with his spirit, that

he is born of God. It is this he wishes to ascertain; and, like the poet, exclaims,

"T'is a point I long to know;
Oft it causes anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his, or am I not?

"If I love, why am I thus?
Why this dull and lifeless frame?
Hardly, sure, can they be worse,
Who have never heard his name.

"Lord, decide the doubtful case;
Thou, who art thy people's Sun,
Shine upon thy work of grace,
If it be indeed begun." NEWTON.

We may add once more, that, to many Christians, the thought of approaching dissolution becomes a source of distress. Death, indeed, in itself is awful, and few can look forward to it without feeling some degree of tremor; but of all characters, none ought to meet it with such confidence as the Christian. To him it will be a pleasant change, and so far from being a matter of dread, it should excite him to rejoice. Yet, alas! how many Christians are all their lifetime subject to bondage through the fear of it! They can look back and bear a happy testimony to that goodness and mercy which have always followed them; but when they look forward, behold, it is all a gloom. "If, after all," say they, "we should be left to sink in the swellings of Jordan! How dreadful then to

find that God has withdrawn his influence, and to be left to struggle with pain and with death without his support! O, how awful to see the King of Terrors in dread array: to witness the world receding, eternity opening, and the summons sent to appear before the Most High God, to give an account of every action done in the body, whether good or bad!" Thus Christians sometimes increase their own misery, and through unbelief, experience those sorrows in life which scarcely ever are they suffered to feel in the hour of death. We have now just cursorily run through the trials of a Christian. They may not be felt alike by all. Some may be more exposed to one, and some to another; but they all have something to struggle with while here. It is necessary, however, to answer an objection, which, on a review of this part of the Christian experience, may be started. "Where is the advantage of being a Christian," it may be said, "if there be so much distress in his experience?" We answer, were this distress to last always, the question might be well asked. But this is not the case.* "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Ps. xxx. 5, Ps. cxxxvi. 6. His experience, it is true, is distressing, but it is all a token for good; it is all for a wise end. He weeps

* See the next chapter.

for the present, that he may rejoice in future. He is cast down, but it is that he may be lifted up. But after all, supposing that his sorrow was perpetual here on earth, still it is better to mourn here, than for ever hereafter; to weep in time, than in eternity; to feel a hell in this world, than in that which is to come. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. He shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying—they shall see his face—and reign for ever and ever." Matt. v. 4, Is. lxvi. 2, Rev. xxi. 4.

But I can not dismiss this chapter without giving encouragement to those whose experience is so distressing. Remember that, if God had determined to have left you to yourself, to have abandoned you to wretchedness, he would not have penetrated your heart, convinced you of your depravity, wrought concern in your breast, and filled you with such anxious desire to glorify him. That deep humiliation, that strong conviction, that pungent distress you feel on account of your sin, is not the work of nature nor the production of Satan; but of God, who wounds, that he may heal; who kills that he may make alive.

But you are looking forward, perhaps, to discouragements yet to come. Your soul is cast down within you, because there are still powerful enemies to be en-

countered, and various troubles to be borne. Christian, recollect the advice of thy best friend: "Take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself; sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Matt. vi. 34. Consider, too, that you have a wise guide; one who has travelled the way before you, who knows all its difficulties, and is well acquainted with all its dangers. He can cause you to know the way wherein you should walk. Follow his footsteps, and you can not go wrong. Act in character as one of his; for "when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." John x. 4.

You have also a strong guard. In a dangerous road a guide is necessary, but is not always sufficient. But you, Christian, have both a guide and a protector. What enemy but he can conquer? what mountain but he can make a plain? what swelling flood but he can in a moment dry up? He can make all things subservient to the accomplishment of his purposes and the safety of his people; and what has he not said? "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Is. xliii. 2.

You shall also not only be protected, but supplied. You may be faint by the way, your strength may be nearly exhausted, your hopes may be low, your

faith shaken; but "my God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." He hath appointed places of refreshment by the way. His Sabbath, his table, his word, his mercy-seat, are all for your accommodation. Here, Christian traveller, you shall be supported, your spiritual strength renewed; you shall yet say, "The Lord is my Shepherd: I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake."

Consider farther, too, for your encouragement, those who have gone before: you are not travelling an unknown road, through which none have passed. Consider their example, their supports, their patience, their perseverance, their final triumph, and remember, their God is yours. The same hand that conducted them is leading you. Remember, too, O weary pilgrim, that you are not a solitary traveller; you are not going alone. Look round you, and behold others in the same road. Throw off reserve, open your heart, and by the communication of your own experience you will in turn know the experience of others; by which you will see that they are conflicting with the same enemies, meeting the same difficulties, and enduring the same trials as yourself.

Consider, finally, the end you have in view. You are not walking in a path strewed with flowers, which leads to shame; but a path which, although

set with thorns, yet leads to glory. You may look forward with pleasure: every passing moment decreases the sum of your trials. The vehicle of time is carrying you rapidly away from all the storms and tempests of life. Think how soon you will be home, and at home never to return. What, then, are a few trials by the way, when compared to the happiness of the end? Think how much the crown of glory will outweigh the crown of thorns. O, how pleasant to reflect on the bright scenes of eternal felicity! "When the earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we shall have a building of God; an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory."

"There shall we bathe our weary souls
In seas of heavenly rest,
And not a wave of trouble roll
Across our peaceful breast." WATTS.

CHAPTER VI.

ON HAPPY EXPERIENCE.

WHILE some Christians are travelling in the dark valley, filled with fear, and ready to despond under a sense of their unworthiness, there are others who are on the mount, whose hopes are bright, and whose prospects are delightful and unbounded. They can take a retrospective view of the divine conduct, and with a joyful confidence declare, that he hath done all things well. They can look round them, and with faith discern a wise hand directing every event, and overruling all for their good. They can look before them, and with joy anticipate the inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Such is the happy experience of many Christians. Let it not be understood, however, that by happy experience, I always mean remarkable high emotions, ecstatic pleasures, or ravishing transports. These are scattered with a sparing hand, and are chiefly reserved for a better world. Prosperity of soul may exist without them, as the health of the body may be sound without the animal spirits being always lively. Where, indeed,

religion flourishes, cheerfulness will not be absent; and, from the nature of soul prosperity, we may conclude that it will produce that pleasure which contrary principles prescribe. Yet let him that is sighing for spiritual health remember that he may attain to it without always experiencing the highest sensible joys. It is, perhaps, necessary to make this remark, as many have mistaken the nature of soul prosperity, and placed it more in strong and unspeakable sensations, than in a contrite and humble spirit. That may be termed a happy experience in general, in which love to God is the prevailing principle, notwithstanding there may be many discouragements in the way; for where this becomes, as it were, the ruling passion, everything else will be brought into subserviency to it. The heart will be affected, the thoughts generally conversant about divine things, and the deportment such as becometh the Gospel of Christ.

But may we not stop here and ask, Is this the object sought for by the generality of the human race? Is this the utmost wish of their hearts? Is it for this they groan, they toil, they exert themselves? Ah! sin, what hast thou done? How hast thou inverted everything; and into what a deluded and dangerous path hast thou directed the footsteps of man! Any kind of prosperity is desired in preference to that of the soul. The honor of the world, the accumulation of riches, the decoration of the person, the seat of power, the plaudits of the multi-

tude; these are objects infinitely more important in the view of most men. These are the idols at whose shrine any sacrifice is made, any inconvenience suffered; so that these gods may be propitious. For what is all that bustle we see in life, that vigorous activity, that deep concern, that painful anxiety? For what that the day is spent in labor, and the night refusing sleep? For what that ingenuity plans her schemes; that patience waits; that perseverance crowns her labors? Ah! for what that talents are displayed, opportunities embraced, and zeal, busy zeal, pushing into action? I ask, for what are all these? For the glory of our Maker; for the prosperity of the soul; for the promotion of truth, and the enlargement of her empire? Ah! no. This activity is all confined to time: the end that stimulates the exertion extends no farther than this world. The concern is for the body. All this mighty bustle, this laborious service, is for a trifle, a bubble, a nothing; while the improvement of the mind, the care of the soul, the favor of God, are treated with contempt, or absolutely forgotten!!!

Thanks be to thy name, however, O Father of Mercies, that while with sorrow we view the degeneracy of man, yet we can rejoice that there are some whom thou hast formed for thyself, and who shall show forth thy praise; who, while many are going about, and saying, Who will show us *any* good? are imploring thy favor, choosing the one thing needful, and with willing feet are running the way of

thy commandments. These are the characters who value the health of the mind, who place not their happiness in sensual gratifications, who are truly wise, and shall finally receive that crown of glory which awaits the righteous. Yes, "These shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day, and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. These shall flourish like the palm-tree; they shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They shall bring forth fruit in old age. They shall come to the grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season. Yes, these shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. These shall be for ever with the Lord." Ps. lxxxix. 16, Ps. xcii. 10, 11, Job. v. 26, Matt. xiii. 43, 1 Thess. iv. 17.

Let us now proceed to consider more particularly the happy experience of a Christian, or what may be considered as evidencing prosperity of soul.

And first, we may observe, that it is attended with increasing knowledge. It is the divine command, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." It is the divine promise, "that the righteous shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall;" and it is a portrait drawn by the divine hand, "that the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." 2 Pet. iii. 18, Mal. iv. 2, Prov. iv. 18. From all these passages it is evident that the knowledge of a Christian is not stationary—it is progress-

ive. He is daily adding to his stock. The Sun of Truth rises with increasing radiance on his mind, and as his knowledge is of the best kind, it can not fail to be productive of the best feelings. It is true, he sees more of his own ignorance, but it leads him to appreciate that light which alone can direct to eternal felicity. The nearer he approaches to the fountain of intelligence, the more he is humbled under a sense of his own contracted powers. This, however, is no barrier to his progress; it rather stimulates him to be more diligent. He does not sit down in indolent carelessness, and say, "I can not know all; objects are too vast for my comprehension. The wisest, after all, must remain ignorant. I shall give up the pursuit, and be content with what I have." No; the infinite loveliness of the divine mind appears so delightful and glorious to him, that he desires to know more. The perfections of Jehovah, though they fill him with awe, yet engage his attention, and excite his study. The glories of the Saviour are continually unfolding to his view. With delight he contemplates the attributes he possesses, the offices he sustains, the relations he bears, and the promises he has made. Here he always finds something new, something wonderful, something beautiful. Like the angels, he is employed "in looking into these things," but with a pleasure superior to theirs, as he is more interested than they. O, what joy does he feel in an increasing acquaintance with the Saviour's love! He sits down under his

shadow with great delight, while he exclaims, "Thou art fairer than the children of men, the altogether lovely. Who would not fear, who would not love thee? Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth I desire beside thee. Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." Ps. xlv. 2, Ps. lxxiii. 25.

As the understanding of the Christian becomes more and more enlightened, he discerns more of the excellency, and feels more of the energy, of the sacred Scriptures. The Bible contains not only milk for babes, but strong meat for them that are full of age; even those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. The Christian is constantly increasing in his knowledge of these divine truths; and perhaps nothing can exceed the pleasure he feels in a growing discovery of the harmony, the unity, the simplicity, the meaning of the word of God. At first, perhaps, he received the Bible as divinely inspired, merely upon the assertion of others, or because it was the book received among the community with whom he was brought up; but now, having examined it for himself, he is fully convinced that the marks of divinity are upon it. Formerly there were many parts which, at a distance, appeared like so many barren spots, but on a nearer approach, he has found fruitful and pleasant. The older he grows, and the more experience he has, the more he sees that this is the only sure guide. He finds himself cautioned by its warnings, encouraged

by its promises, established by its doctrine, directed by its precepts, animated by its examples, and consoled by its prospects. He finds himself amply repaid in the contemplation of its various contents. Its richness, its simplicity, its purity, its effect, render it an invaluable treasure in his estimation. "I rejoice in thy word (said David) as one that findeth great spoil. The entrance thereof giveth light. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." Ps. cxix.

Again; strong faith is another part of the Christian's happy experience. He is enabled to give credit to God's word, to believe in his promises, to submit to his providences, and refer all his concerns into his hand. "I know that my Redeemer liveth," said Job. David says, "The Lord is my light, and my salvation; whom shall I fear? he is the strength of my heart; of whom shall I be afraid?" "Although (says Habakkuk) the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the field shall yield no meat, the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls, yet will I rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation." "I am pursuaded (says the apostle Paul) that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Job xix. 26, Ps. xxvii. 1, Hab.

iii. 17, 18, Rom. viii. 38, 39. Such are the noble declarations and delightful effects of faith! With what pleasure can the Christian look up to the Sovereign of the universe, believing him to work all things according to the counsel of his own will! They see his wise hand in all the events of time; they know he leads them by a right way. Without presuming, they can read their names in the book of life. They have the witness within themselves that they are born of God. In times of outward calamity they can repose confidence in a faithful God. What pleasing instances have we of this! Time would fail us to mention a Moses, a Noah, an Abraham, a Joseph, a Daniel, a Paul, with a number of others, who faced danger without fear, encountered difficulties without murmuring, endured hardships with fortitude, and bore opposition with patience. Nor let it be supposed, that these feelings were peculiar to extraordinary men, such as patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. Christians in general, when in a state of soul prosperity, can commit all into the hands of their sovereign Lord. They know in whom they believe, and that he will supply their wants, and be with them to the end. When Mr. Dod, in the time of the wars, was plundered of all he had in his house, his wife was in great distress about it. "Wife (says he), be not troubled; I have a bond yet to live upon." "What bond?" said she. "Why, this bond (said he) in the Hebrews; 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Come, let us put this

bond into suit; let us go to prayer." The next morning the neighbors sent him in more than he had lost. "I am filled with the grace of God (said the pious Rivet in his last illness), I fear no more the inconveniences of temporal life; the Spirit of God strengthens me, and affords me abundant consolations. I have no doubt of my salvation. He hath set me on high. He hath hid me in his hiding place. I am like a vessel filled with pure water, which no agitation troubles.

Sincere and strong affection to God enters into the Christian's happy experience. His mind not only perceives the excellency of the divine character, and the beauty of holiness, but his heart is powerfully drawn to God as the best of beings. He feels ardent affection to him, and longs to enjoy more of him. With what delight he exclaims, "O thou whom unseen I love, by what powerful influence dost thou attract my soul! The eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive what thou art; and yet I love thee beyond all that mine eye hath seen, or my ear heard; beyond all that my heart can comprehend. Thou dwellest in heights of glory, to which no human thought can soar; and yet thou art nearer and more intimate to my soul than any of the objects of sense. These ears have never heard thy voice, and yet I am better acquainted with thee, and can rely on thee with more confidence than on the dearest friend I have on earth. My heart cleaves to thee, O Lord, as its

only refuge, and finds in thee a secret and constant spring of consolation. I speak to thee with the utmost confidence, and think thy being my greatest happiness. I love thee. Thus far I can speak, but all the rest is unutterable, and I must leave the pleasing tale untold till I can talk in the language of immortality, and then I'll begin the transporting story, which will never come to an end, but be still and still beginning; for thy beauties, O thou fairest of ten thousand, will still be new, and shall kindle fresh ardor in my soul to all eternity! The sacred flame shall rise, nor find any limits till thy perfections find a period. I love thee; and, O thou that knowest all things, read the characters that love has drawn on my heart: what excellence but thine in heaven and earth could raise such aspirations of soul, such sublime and fervent affections, as those I feel? What could fix my spirit but boundless perfection? What is there else for whose sake I could despise all created glory? Ye flowery vanities of the earth, and yon sparkling glories of the skies, your blandishments are vain, while I pursue an excellence that casts a reproach on all your glory. I would fain close my eyes on all the various and lovely appearances you present, and would open them on a brighter scene. I have desires which nothing visible can gratify, to which no material things are suitable. O, when shall I find objects more entirely agreeable to my intellectual faculties? My soul springs forward in pursuit of a distant good,

which I followed by some faint ray of light, which only glimmers by short intervals before me. O, when will it disperse the clouds, and break out in full splendor on my soul!" (*See Mrs. Rowe's Devout Exercises.*)

Notwithstanding the Christian considers all here as vanity and vexation of spirit, and longs for the presence of God in a future state, yet it must not be concluded that he is destitute of holy joy. Nothing is more common than to hear the world inveigh against religious characters, as persons who are of a melancholy cast, unfit for society, and strangers to happiness. If by happiness they mean that which the world only affords, the mere gratification of the appetite, the frivolous pleasures of time and sense, we grant they are not happy in their sense of the word. For they seek not felicity in these objects; they are taught to set their affections on things above, and not on things on the earth. Their taste is spiritual, their judgment of things enlightened, their affections placed on nobler objects than what this world can produce. They have, it is true, their moments of depression, their seasons of distress, and, alike with others, are exposed to the common calamities of human life. But although weeping may endure for a night, yet joy cometh in the morning. Unto the upright there ariseth light in darkness. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. If there be any truth in the declarations of holy men, in the testimony of experience, and the decisions of sacred

writ, the righteous are of all men the most happy. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." Is. lxi. 10. "Whom having not seen, ye love; whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." 1 Pet. i. 8. The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all the paths thereof are peace. Prov. iii. 17. Indeed, what can be more reasonable than to suppose this? My God, if there be not happiness in communion with thee, in the enjoyment of thy presence, in the prospect of beholding thy glory for ever in a better state, where can happiness be found in the universe? If he be not happy whose sins are pardoned, whose conscience is purified, whose feet are directed in the way to heaven, who then can be happy? If he be not happy whose nature is renovated, whose rebellious passions are subdued, whose heart is attached to the truth, who then is? If he be not happy whose mind is enlightened, whose will is inclined to good, whose soul is taken up in the contemplation of the divine glories, who then is? If he be not happy who has the Bible for his rule, the Holy Spirit for his guide, angels and ministers for his attendants, saints for his companions, heaven for his end, and God himself for his portion; ah! if such be not happy, then there

is no happiness! It is only a name; and the whole universe is destined to perpetual woe and misery. But the Christian does experience a joy, and that of the purest, of the sublimest, of the noblest kind. "His soul dwells at ease. The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keepeth his heart and mind. He glories even in tribulation, and rejoices in hope of the glory of God." Ps. xxv. 13, Phil. iv. 6, Rom. v. 3. The world may reproach, troubles may assail, enemies may oppose, a thousand difficulties may arise; but when the soul prospers, all is well. For thine it is, O adorable Emanuel, to keep the feet of thy saints; thine to support them in the trying hour: thine to inspire them with holy joy; and thine, at last, to crown with eternal glory.

We have before observed, that the soul may be in health without always experiencing *transports* of joy, and that the Christian, though he may be happy, yet is not in the present state to expect continual ecstasies. There have been some instances, however, of extraordinary experience and singular manifestations, which, as some would think complete enthusiasm to believe, so I think, on the other hand, it would be incredulity to deny. I am no advocate for visions, revelations, and singular impulses [see chapter on "Advice respecting Experience"]; yet there have been, and may be, instances of sublime consolation, which, upon the most rational survey of things according to Scripture, may be considered as divine. "It would take up many whole

pages," says Dr. Watts, "to cite such instances as we find upon record in the lives of particular persons. Many such may be found in Mr. Fleming's Fulfilling of the Scripture. Even in our day, we have the example of a person whose solid sense, whose deep sagacity, whose sedate judgment, and the superior excellence of his reasoning powers, leave no room to charge him with vain and delusive raptures of a heated imagination. The name is the venerable Mr. John Howe. The name commands respect, and confirms the narrative. He wrote the following paragraphs in the blank leaf of his own Bible.

"December 26, 1689. After that I had long seriously and repeatedly thought with myself, that, besides a full and undoubted assent to the objects of faith, a vivifying, savory taste and relish of them was also necessary, that with stronger force, and more powerful energy, they might penetrate into the most inward centre of my heart, and there, being most deeply fixed and rooted, govern my life; and that there could be no other sure ground whereon to conclude and pass a sound judgment on my good estate outward, and after I had in my course of preaching been largely insisting on 1 Cor. ii. 12, 'This is my rejoicing, the testimony of a good conscience,' &c., this very morning I awoke out of a most ravishing and delightful dream, that a wonderful and copious stream of celestial rays from the lofty throne of the Divine Majesty did seem to dart into my open and expanded breast. I have often since, with great

complacency, reflected on that very signal pledge of special divine favor vouchsafed to me on that noted memorable day, and have with repeated fresh pleasure tasted the delights thereof.

"But what of the same kind I sensibly felt through the admirable bounty of my God, and the most pleasant comforting influence of the Holy Spirit on Oct. 22, 1704, far surpassed the most expressive words my thoughts can suggest. I then experienced an inexpressibly pleasant melting of heart, tears gushing out of mine eyes for joy, that God should shed abroad his love abundantly through the hearts of men, and that for this very purpose mine own heart should be so signally possessed of and by his blessed Spirit."

Of Mr. Flavel it is said, "That in a journey on horseback he fell into a divine meditation, wherein he had such tokens of the love of God, and his interest in the divine favor, manifested to him, that greatly surpassed all the rational and inferential evidences that ever he had, though he was known to be a close walker with God, an eminent saint, and a lively preacher of the blessed Gospel of Christ."

These instances are not mentioned to discourage those whose joys do not run so high, but to show that God in his infinite goodness is pleased sometimes to favor his people, even while here, with remarkable manifestations of his glory. They who have them must consider themselves as highly privileged; and they who have them not, however, must

not despair, since the Lord acts as a Sovereign in the dispensation of his favor, and, after all, it is his grace, and not his consolations, that saves us. But we proceed, in the next place, to observe, that deep humility and meekness of spirit peculiarly characterize the prosperous Christian. Prosperity of soul consists in living near to God; and living near to God will always produce humility. In proportion as we approach the Divine Majesty, the more we shall be confounded and overwhelmed with the radiant beams of his glory. Who is it that boasts, that thinks much of himself, that is perpetually talking of his own merit and abilities? Surely it is not the prosperous Christian: it must be the man who knows little of himself, who lives at a distance from the Fountain of light and perfection. The discoveries which the Gospel makes of the glorious attributes of the Creator, and the discoveries which grace makes of the imperfections and depravity of the creature, cause the Christian to lie low in his own esteem, and to think highly of his God. Thus Isaiah, after a view he had of the divine glory, exclaims, "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips; and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." Thus the apostle, notwithstanding all his superior attainments, calls himself "the least of all saints:" so John, when he beheld the glory of his Redeemer, was so overpowered that he fell at his feet as dead. We may con-

sider humility as one of the first and one of the surest evidences of the health of the mind. And it is this which, "though the most lowly, is the most lovely of the Christian graces, and throws an amiable lustre on all the rest. It is in the Christian life the same as the well-disposed shades in a picture, which set it off to advantage; for though the shades are not striking in themselves, yet they give an inexpressible beauty to the whole piece."* How pleasant is it to see the Christian in this spirit! While the proud are racked with envy and jealousy, pushed on by ambition and vanity, so as to become restless and wretched, the humble Christian walks on quietly and contentedly. The provocations of men do not ruffle him; the reproaches of the world do not depress him. The happy spirit he possesses teaches him to think lowly of himself, to bear with injuries, to forgive unkindness. If he hears that any one has reviled him, he is ready to say with the philosopher, "Had he known me better, he would have said worse things of me than that." The opinion of the world, popular applause, and honors which fade away, are not sought for by him. And as he aims not at these objects, so he meets not with those vexations which generally disturb the minds of those who are anxiously pursuing them. He considers himself more secure in the valley than on the mountain; as the weakest plant is preserved in the one, while the loftiest tree is often torn to pieces

* Mason.

by the tempest on the other. It must not be, however, understood that the Christian is of a weak and pusillanimous mind; that his views of himself and of things destroy his peace, and prevent his rejoicing. We grant that there may sometimes be an extreme even in this, and that the enemy may take an advantage to confine our attention so to our unworthiness, as almost to prevent our application to Christ as the Saviour. But true, genuine humility is of a calm, peaceful, happy nature. Yea, if happiness is to be found anywhere, it is in that breast where humility reigns. It is the grand key to contentment; and a man can only be at rest as he is humble. To such a character afflictions are met without repining, and borne without impatience. Duties are not thought hard, nor crosses unnecessary. Candor, meekness, forbearance, patience, kindness, are the lovely train that attend the abodes of humility, while they adorn and bless its happy subject.

Further, the prosperous Christian enjoys frequent communion with his God. "Truly," says St. John, "our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." "God is faithful (says St. Paul), by whom ye were called to the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." 1 Jo. i. 3, 1 Cor. i. 9. What happy moments does he spend in the enjoyment of the divine presence! How delightfully he contemplates the attributes, the works, the providences, the promises, of the Almighty! At the

throne of grace, in reading the sacred Oracles, in hearing the glorious Gospel, in singing divine praises, and sitting down at his Master's table, what happy communion does he enjoy! In contemplating the works of creation, the dispensations of Providence, and the displays of mercy and grace, his heart is drawn away from the world, and lifted up to heaven. With David he can say, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased. He finds that in the light of his heavenly King's countenance there is life, and that his favor is as the cloud of the latter rain." Ps. iv. 6, Prov. xvi. 15. None know, but those who have experienced it, what sublime joys, what divine tranquillity, flow into the soul when thus communing with God. Here it is that the Christian forgets all the toils, the cares, the troubles of the way. Here that his mind is absorbed in delightful contemplations of the wonders of redeeming love. Here that he reads his name in the book of life, and rejoices in God as his portion. Here that he shakes the dust from his feet, catches the celestial fire that warms his heart, and expands all the powers of his soul. Here that he looks forward and anticipates with the highest pleasure, the crown, the immortality, the glory, the joys, which are to come. It is true he finds himself in a world where objects touch him on every side, and where a thousand things stand ready to draw off his mind, and thus interrupt his pleasures. But he is anxious

every day to keep up this communion with God, and to make every event, whether prosperous or adverse, subservient to it. "O that I may set the Lord before me continually! Thou hast been the kind guardian of my life; should I not then devote myself to thee? Should I not commit myself to thy care? I know not what a day may bring forth: but this I know, that all events are in thy hand, and that thou canst not do wrong. Afford me the light of thy countenance, and all shall be well. Then welcome crosses, disappointments, and trials. I can bear all things when thou art with me. If thou art my light, no darkness can surround me. If thou art my strength, no trouble can depress me. If thou art my salvation, no enemy can conquer me." Even in the concerns of a family, or the cares of business, he still walks with him, constantly imploring that wisdom which is profitable to direct; that meekness which shall bear opposition without being ruffled; that fortitude that shall meet difficulties without being dismayed; and in everything that spirit which is suitable to the Christian character, and which shall favor his fellowship with God.

Another thing that enters into the happy experience of a Christian is submission to the will of God. "I was dumb (said the psalmist), and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." Aaron, under a severe trial, it is said, held his peace. Job stands upon the ruins of temporal prosperity, and exclaims, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away:

blessed be the name of the Lord." The consideration of the sovereignty, the wisdom, the love, the covenant, the promises, and the conduct of his God, enables him to bear with patience, while the Holy Spirit powerfully strengthens and supports his mind, by bringing it to depend less on the creature, and more on the Creator. "I see God will have all my heart, and he *shall* have it," was a fine reflection made by a lady, when news was brought that two of her children were drowned. And how resigned was the mind of that Christian female who, being sick, was asked, whether she was willing to live or die, answered, "Which God pleases!" "But (said one) if God refer it to you, which would you choose?" "Truly (replied she), I would refer it to him again." What are trials to that man who knows and believes that all are under the direction of a wise hand? What are losses to him who places his happiness in the chief good? What are bereavements to him who believes that God can be better to him than millions of creatures? What is opposition to him who knows that he, to whom all power belongs, can, in a moment, frustrate the wisest schemes, break to pieces the most formidable weapons, or scatter a thousand foes, by a sudden turn of his providence? O, what are all the afflictions of life, or even death itself, to him who neither covets the one, nor fears the other, but with a noble triumph can say, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!"

Indeed, if it were only the benefit he has derived

from past afflictions, I say if it were only this, he finds an argument even here for submission to the divine will. What is the language of experienced Christians? "How good is it (says one) for me to be afflicted; for before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." "I was at ease (says another); I doted on my children, they became my idols; but I saw them unexpectedly snatched away, and now have I learned how necessary it is that God only should be my portion." "The wheel of business (says a third) ran round so rapidly, that nothing else engaged my attention; but suddenly it stopped; mortified and dispirited, I retired; I flew to the Bible, and there I read, 'Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.' At once the passage was explained, and my own conduct became the best expositor." "Fain (says a fourth) would I have gone through yonder flowery fields, where the refreshing stream delightfully glides along, and where the prospects seem so charming and pleasant. But no (says Providence), you must tread a different path; a path where, to all appearance, nothing but barrenness, briers, and thorns could be seen. Here (says the Christian), as I advanced, behold the crooked was made straight, the rough places plain, and the wilderness became a fruitful land; while looking with more discernment on yonder field of pleasure, there I saw that, though thousands entered with such willing feet and happy countenances, yet behold, the end was indolence and

wretchedness, poverty and death. Thus (says the Christian) would I no more desire my own will, but be resigned to him who knows what is best for his creatures; and who, though he leads them not in a path of their own choosing, yet conducts them in a right way.

"My times of sorrow and of joy,
Great God, are in thy hand;
My choicest comforts came from thee,
And go at thy command.

"If thou shouldst take them all away,
Yet would I not repine;
Before they were possessed by me,
They were entirely thine.

"Nor would I drop a murm'ring word,
Tho' the whole world were gone;
But seek enduring happiness
In *Thee*, and Thee alone!"

Another thing which characterizes the prosperous Christian is ardent zeal. Grace is operative, and in proportion as we are influenced by it we shall be active. A cold, frozen-hearted Christian is a contradiction of terms. To be a Christian is to be like Christ, who was full of holy zeal and heavenly ardor. A gracious mind perceives the importance of truth, values immortal souls, and is concerned for their welfare, and the promotion of the divine glory in the world. What is it but his zeal that causes him to lament with David, and say, "Rivers of water run down mine eves, because men keep

not thy law?" Ps. cxix. 136. What but his zeal that makes him even ashamed of himself, that so many years have been passed, and so little, comparatively, done for God? What but zeal that makes him sorrowful at the thought of so many being at ease in Zion, who have a name to live, and yet are dead? What but zeal that makes him lament when deprived of divine ordinances, and to say with David, "Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, nor slumber to my eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God?" Ps. cxxxii. 3, etc. What but zeal that bears him up with fortitude against opposition, and stimulates him, in the midst of all, to devise and execute benevolent plans for the happiness of miserable sinners? "What shall I do (says the Christian), that shall best subserve the interests of my fellow mortals? I feel the obligations I am under to the God of my salvation. How much has he done for me! and now what shall I do for him? O, how shall I set forth his glory, and speak of his goodness to the children of men! Father of Spirits, thou from whom all life, light, and energy proceed, enable me to be an active instrument in the promotion of thy glory. How short is life, how precious are souls, how awful is eternity! Alas! how many are perishing for lack of knowledge, even in the circle in which I move! O that my temper, my conversation, my influence,

my conduct, may be so under thy blessing as to become the means of doing good! Shall the merchant compass sea and land for wealth? Shall the astronomer gaze with rapturous ardor on a newly-discovered planet? Shall the philosopher spend days and nights in the pursuit of a favorite theme? Shall the tradesman labor and toil, and expose himself to continual inconveniences for the things that are passing away? And, what! shall I sit still, and dream my life away? Shall all creation be in motion? shall the world exhibit nothing but bustle and activity? and shall I indulge myself in indolent repose? I, who have eternity in view, who have turned my back on the world, who believe the awful realities of heaven and hell? O let my whole time be employed in some useful service, that I may be always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that my labor can not be in vain in the Lord!" Thus the Christian, like Caleb, is of a different spirit from the world, and follows the Lord fully; like Phineas, is zealous for the Lord of Hosts, and with Paul can say, that "it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing." Numb. xiv. 24, Gal. iv. 18.

Grateful recollection forms another part of the Christian's happy experience. He considers, with thankfulness and pleasure, the mercies he has received, the dangers from which he has been saved, the troubles out of which he has been delivered, and the various crosses that have been turned into com-

forts; yea, he looks back, even to the house of mourning, and remembers well how the chamber of sickness became the place of instruction, the time of bereavement a season of usefulness, and difficulties in circumstances the means of dependence. From opposition he has gained courage; from difficulty he has derived faith; from the vanity of the creature he has been led to see the fulness of the Creator. From a sense of weakness he has increased in strength; and from the valley of trouble he has gathered the sweet fruit of humility, patience, and submission to the divine will. Think too, reader, how happy the Christian must be, when not a day passes but his mind is led to reflect on the goodness of his God. Every morning and night brings fresh matter to feed his gratitude. Hear his language! "Have I had a good night; and have I not an errand to the throne of grace to return thanks for it? How many mercies have concurred to make it a good night! Distinguished mercies; mercies, perhaps, granted to me, but not to others! Many have not where to lay their heads; my Master himself had not; but I have a house to dwell in, a quiet and peaceable habitation. I have a bed to lay on, and have not to wander in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth, as some of the best of God's saints have been forced to do, of whom the world was not worthy. Many have beds to lie on, yet dare not or can not lie down in them, being kept up either by the sickness of their friends, or the fear

of their enemies. But I have laid me down, and there have been none to make me afraid; no alarms of the sword, either of war or persecution. Many lay them down, and can not sleep, but are full of tossings to and fro, until the dawning of the day, through pain of body or anguish of mind. Wearisome nights are appointed to them, and their eyes are held waking; but I have laid down, and slept without any disturbance, and my sleep was sweet and refreshing, the pleasant parenthesis of my care and toils. Many lay them down and sleep and never rise again; they sleep the sleep of death, and their beds are their graves; but I have slept and awaked again, have rested, and am refreshed, because the Lord hath sustained me."

"Have I," says the Christian, "a pleasant morning? Is the light sweet? The light of the sun, the light of the eyes; do these rejoice the heart? And ought I not to own my obligations to Him who opens my eyes, and opens the eyelids of the morning upon me? Have I clothes to put on? change of raiment, not for necessity only, but also for ornament? I have them from God: it is his wool and flax that are given to cover me; and shall I not praise him for it? Am I in health and ease? Have I been long so? O, how thankful ought I to be." (*See Henry on Communion with God.*)

When the evening approaches, he looks back through the day, and calls to mind the manifold instances of divine kindness. How many evils have

befallen the sons of men this day! Some have been laboring under racking pains of body, others left to all the rage of despair. Some unexpectedly bereaved of their choicest comforts, others exposed to accidents of the most alarming kind. Many, perhaps, have lost all they had by some unforeseen event; and multitudes have been tossed about on the troubled waves of human adversity. Some, perhaps, have had their reputation blasted by a malignant foe; others been unjustly deprived of the inheritance they had long expected. How many who have been stripped of their friends by removals or by deaths! and how many who are suffering from their friends becoming enemies, and those who were near to them, by ties of nature, no longer allied to them by the bonds of affection! Ah! my God, how many may be the evils of one day; but here I am signalized by thy favor, and though not without my trials, yet how thankful should I feel for an exemption from these troubles! The pleasures of health, of friendship, of liberty, of peace, of character, of property, have been continued, and much more, of communion with thee. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits he hath bestowed upon me? Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name: for he hath crowned my life with loving kindness and tender mercies. Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

Again; a constant and ardent breathing after holiness distinguishes the prosperous Christian. No

attainments he has made, no good works he has performed, ever satisfy him. He never arrives at a point where he can sit down and say, I have enough, I want no more, I am at rest. I feel complacency in what I have done. I can go no farther. I can make no higher progress in knowledge or holiness. On the contrary, the nearer he approaches to God, the more he sees of his own imperfection, the more he discerns of the beauties of holiness, and the more he desires to conform to him. "O that my thoughts," says the Christian, "may always be directed in a right channel, my affections wholly placed on the chief good, my powers all employed in his service, and for the promotion of his glory! Thou, O God, art the best of beings; infinitely lovely in thyself; the fountain of all excellency. I want to be more like thee; my temper, my conversation, my conduct, my exertions, my all to reflect the splendor of thy grace. How hateful is sin to me! how it defiles the soul, darkens the mind, and exposes to the most extreme wretchedness! O purify my heart, subdue all the corruptions of my nature, keep under thy subjection all the passions of my soul! Whatever befalls me, let me not sin against thee; but give me grace that I may persevere, perfecting holiness in thy sight. Order my steps in thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in

the way everlasting. Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant, also, from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and Redeemer!" Ps. cxix. 133, Ps. cxxxix. 2 last, Ps. xix. 11, 12, 14.

Thus the Christian wishes to run the race that is set before him, and to lay aside every weight. He knows God is the chief good, the author of all holiness and happiness; and though he is certain he is not to be justified or accepted on account of his desires, his merit, his works, but solely by the grace of Christ, yet his soul burns with holy ardor to be conformed to him, to see more of his glories, to taste more of his love, to enjoy more of his presence, and live more to his praise. "Doubtless," saith the apostle, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ—and that I may be found in him—that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death. If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead: not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I

press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Phil. iii. 8, &c.

Lastly; anticipation of a future state of blessedness enters much into the experience of the prosperous Christian. How pleasant to him to reflect that he shall soon have done with all the troubles and discouragements of the way! Here, it is true, the animal frame is subject to pain; trials disturb, enemies oppose, darkness surrounds, and difficulties perplex; but there the weary shall be for ever at rest. It is this that often supports him under the inconveniences of the way, and the troubles to which he is here exposed. "Soon," says he, "shall I have done with all these; and I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. Rom. viii. 17. What is the cross, compared to the crown; the darkness here, to the everlasting light hereafter; the contempt and indignity of men, to the favor of God; the sorrows of this life, to the joys of heaven; the evils of time, to the glories of eternity? And I am passing on; every moment brings me nearer. Heaven, glory, God, immortality, are opening to my view. O, how transporting to think that I shall be for *ever* with the Lord; *ever* to admire his perfections; *ever* to adore his designs; *ever* to contemplate the wisdom of his providence, and the works of his hands; *ever* to celebrate his goodness; *ever*, with the celestial multitude, to surround his throne, and ascribe everlasting honors to his name!

There sweet harmony, glorious liberty, pure affection, happy union, pleasing recollection, divine intercourse, and sublime pleasure, shall eternally subsist. O happy period, when the shackles of mortality shall be broken, when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, and my soul transported to these blissful realms! Adorable Redeemer! when shall I awake up after thy likeness? when wilt thou speak the word, and say, Soul come up hither? Patiently would I wait all the days of my appointed time, till my change come; but, O the day, the happy day, when the last enemy shall receive the commission to do his work, and I shall be freed from the scenes of mortality to dwell with thee! Let me cherish the thought. Let the world and all its cares sink in my estimation, and let eternity, joyful eternity, be before my view; for I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he will keep that which I have committed to him." Thus the Christian meditates; and with what propriety he may indulge himself in the pleasing employ, we may easily conclude, when we consider the beautiful descriptions and happy promises given in the sacred records, of his final happiness. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." The apostle says, that "We, who have believed, do *enter* into rest." If, after all, then, our present view is only but as an *entrance*,

what will the full possession be! To stand at the door, or to have an entrance only to a superb and beautiful mansion, fills the mind with wonder, but to enter in, fully to survey every object, to inspect every beauty, and see the excellences of the whole, how great the privilege! Thus, here we have an *entrance;* and if even this fills with admiration, what will it be to take complete possession, and behold the infinite glories of that house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! This unspeakable blessing we may anticipate. "Father, I will," says the Saviour, "that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory. They shall come from the east and the west, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God. They shall see his face, and reign for ever and ever." 1 John iii. 1, 2, John xvii. 24; Rev. xxii. 5, 6.

To conclude: learn what an invaluable blessing soul prosperity is. What is every other kind of prosperity when compared with this? What are riches, health, fame, friends, power, grandeur, victories, or even human learning and splendid talents? These may elate, but not sanctify. They give influence over others, but how little over their possessors! They rate high in the estimation of men, but how insignificant in the sight of God! They are as blazing meteors for the moment, but how soon extinct! while the prosperous Christian is a sun that shines for ever. Ah! his soul outweighs them all.

Behold him, and you see more of God, of heaven, of true glory, and of solid happiness, than in all the universe besides. Learn, then, reader, to seek this. You may be a Christian, it is true, but not a prosperous one. But be not content with just being alive; with having a small share of health; with just being able to make out that the vital spark exists, though it be low. Act with your soul as you would with your body, that it may be strong, vigorous, and healthy. Live upon the wholesome food the Gospel affords; use the spiritual exercise it prescribes, avoid the contagious air it prohibits, and watch against those evils it points out, and which naturally tend to prevent growth and strength, energy and action, in the best of services.

Let not, however, the weak and young be discouraged. In reading this chapter, some may be ready to say, "Ah! I am fearful I am deceiving myself. How little do I feel and know of what is here described! My heart is so cold, my knowledge so scanty, my faith so weak, my joys so few, that I am ready to conclude I am yet a stranger to divine grace." But fear not; there may be life where there is not strength. A child may breathe, may feel; but can not speak, can not walk, can not judge. Thus you may be a subject of grace, though at present you possess not that extent of knowledge, that strength of faith, that joy of hope, as many. If God be the object of your affection, if sin be the cause of your grief, if it be sin that makes you so wretched and

miserable from day to day, if it be deliverance from this for which you are perpetually groaning, if it be this, against which you are struggling, that causes the painful conflict, that fills your mind with such distress, then there is hope. Yes, reader, these desires are not implanted in your heart by nature, but by grace. And God works not upon the mind of them who are seeking him, to tantalize and disappoint them. You often think, perhaps, that you are a hypocrite; but the hypocrite knows nothing of holy sorrow. He is a stranger to spiritual distress. He discovers no anxious fears about his state. He never weeps for his sins; but your rest is disturbed by night, your peace by day: you are ready to droop and die; your heart is almost broken with grief, on account of transgression; and shall you be lost? No! He says of the vine that has but a single cluster, "Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it." Go on, therefore. It may be a day of small things with you. You shall increase. The oak was once an acorn; the gigantic stature was once an infant; and things great and permanent often rise from small beginnings. Despond not, therefore: the God of all mercy and grace will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.

CHAPTER VII.

REMEMBRANCE OF PAST EXPERIENCE.

It was an injunction which the apostle Paul gave to the Hebrews, to call to remembrance former days. Heb. x. 34. The Christian is not only called to look forward, and anticipate what is to come, but he is to take a retrospective view of what is past. There is, indeed, a looking back which is *blamable;* such was the case of Lot's wife: but there is a looking back which is *commendable,* and this belongs to every Christian. "Thou shalt remember," said Jehovah to the Israelites, "all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee; to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna (which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know), that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." Deut. viii. 2. Past experience, therefore, must be reflected on, and

the advantages of it will be every way great. Sometimes it will afford instruction, at other times humiliation, and frequently consolation. "I will remember," said the psalmist, "the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old. O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore I will remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites from the hill Mizar." Psa. xlii. 7, Psa. lxxvii. 10, 11.

But, to proceed, let us inquire what it is that the Christian has to call to mind. And, first, we may observe, that he calls to remembrance his former ignorance, and the means by which he was brought "out of darkness into God's marvellous light." "Hearken unto me," saith the Lord, "ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord, look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." Isa. li. 1. It is good to recollect what we once were. "And you (saith the apostle to the Ephesians) hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins. Wherein, in time past, ye walked according to the course of this world; according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom, also, we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." Eph. ii. 1, 2. "We ourselves, also (saith the apostle

again to Titus), were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." Tit. iii. 4. Well the Christian remembers the ignorance of his mind, the enmity of his heart, the strength of his prejudices, and the violence of his opposition against everything serious and good. Religion had no charms for him; the sanctuary of the Lord was forsaken, the Bible neglected, the Sabbath profaned, and the ministers and people of God despised. He saw no beauty in holiness, he felt no attachment to truth, he discovered no excellences in the Redeemer, and, in a word, possessed not the least concern about his immortal soul. He broke through every restraint, and pushed forward through every difficulty, to gratify his corrupt passions. Deaf to the calls of Providence, the expostulations of the righteous, the voice of conscience, and the solemn commands of God's sacred Word, he ran with willing feet the road that leads to misery and woe. To this dark and awful period of his life the Christian looks back with trembling. He beholds with horror the dreadful precipice on which he stood. He meditates with concern the imminent danger to which he was exposed. He laments before God that so much of his time should have been lost, his powers misemployed, and his soul dead to God and the enjoyment of his favor. But, above all, he wonders at the patience and forbearance of God. "Why," saith he, "was I permitted to live? why not made a monument of

vindictive justice, and suffered to sink into eternal despair? Why didst thou not cut me off as a cumberer of the ground, drive me out of light into darkness, and chase me out of the world? Or why might I not have been left in a state of sin and wrath, to have filled up the measure of mine iniquity, to have continued, like others, in rebellion against thee?

> "Why was I made to hear thy voice,
> And enter while there's room,
> While thousands make a wretched choice,
> And rather starve than come?"

When he considers the evil from which he has been delivered, the happy state to which he is brought, the danger in which he was involved, and the consequent blessings that arise from the change, he can not forget even the instruments that were employed. Ah! how he loves the very spot where he first heard the glad tidings of salvation! How he venerates the character whom God honored as the mean of his conversion! Well, perhaps, he recollects the words that darted into his soul, and, like a sharp two-edged sword, pierced even to the dividing asunder, as the apostle says, of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and was a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Heb. iv. 12. Or, probably, it was some conversation with a friend, some singular providence, some unexpected event, that was commissioned and sanctified for the happy purpose. A death in the family, a change in connec-

tions, a heavy loss, a removal from one situation to another, was, perhaps, the means of his first coming to think seriously about his state. He can never forget the place where, the circumstance how, the time when, or the instrument by whom, he was brought to see himself as a miserable sinner, and that Christ alone could be his Saviour. He blesses his God a thousand times that he was plucked as a brand from the burning; he admires the wonders of his providence as to the way in which he was led to attend to divine things; and rejoices, abundantly rejoices, in the remembrance of that all-powerful grace that opened his eyes, broke the fetters by which he was bound, and brought him into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

But it may be said, Every Christian can not thus remember all these circumstances. It is granted that some may be sanctified from the womb; and that in others the work has been so gradual, that they can not recollect any particular sermon, providence, place, or event, where and when the change was first wrought. This, I say, may be granted; but, after all, even in these cases, though the means be not recollected, yet the cause is admired; and if the Christian can not tell when it was he *first* saw, yet he blesses God that he does *now* see. There are very few instances, however, but in which Christians can remember the time when they were not as they now are; and though particular circumstances can not be pointed out, yet they can say, to the

praise of divine grace, that they are made new creatures in Christ Jesus; that old things are past away, and all things are become new. 2 Cor. v. 17.

Conversions of which little or nothing can be remembered by the subjects, are, in my opinion, rare, and often liable to suspicion. We must not, however, limit the Holy One of Israel; he can work upon the minds of his creatures in different ways; and while some are instantaneously changed, in others the work seems to be gradual, if not as to the communication of the first principle of grace, at least as to the evidence of it. It must be observed, however, that wherever this principle is given, it will more or less produce light: light will produce discovery; and a discovery of ourselves, the evil of sin, and the holiness of God, will in general humble the soul; and, owing to the remains of corruption, painful conflicts will ensue. This, therefore, is another thing which many Christians have to call to remembrance. Indeed, the sufferings of some have been very great before they were brought to a clear and comfortable review of the provision made for them in the Gospel of the Son of God. Many a Christian can say, I remember the wormwood and the gall. How did my sins all appear in array before me! I thought I should have sunk under the burden. Not fit to live, and afraid to die, how intolerable was existence itself to me! Innumerable evils compassed me about; mine iniquities took hold of me, so that I was not able to look up: they appeared

more in number than the hairs of my head; my heart failed within me. I said, What shall I do to be saved? Where shall I go? To what object shall I look? Will the God whom I have so greatly offended ever look upon me? Have I not done that which can never be forgiven? And is not the mercy of the Lord clean gone for ever? Thus the Christian has been involved in the deepest distress, until directed to Calvary, there to behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world. By being enabled to view Jesus as an all-sufficient Saviour, at last the burden was removed; and with pleasure he recollects the happy moment when light sprung in upon his soul, when his fears were dissipated, and, through divine goodness, he could say, with a holy confidence, "My Lord, and my God!"

Being thus set at liberty, the Christian calls to mind his consequent joy, his fervent gratitude, his ardent zeal. How lively was he then in prayer! how did he pour out his soul to God! He found it then not as a hard duty to be discharged, but as an inestimable privilege to be enjoyed. With inexpressible pleasure he retired from the world to hold intercourse with God. Here he found his heaven, and his God: his spiritual strength was renewed, and his soul animated to go forward in the path of duty and of diligence. What spirituality, too, was there in his conversation! Like the woman of Samaria, he was ready to say, Come, see a man that hath told me all things that ever I did. Is not this

the Christ? Jo. iv. 29. How ready was he to reprove sin, to defend truth, to exalt the Saviour, and stir up his brethren! What happy hours were spent in profitable conversation about the things of God; how did the time pass away; how did his heart burn within him; how his face shone, and all took knowledge of him that he had been with Jesus! With what alacrity he attended public ordinances! With the psalmist he could say, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." Psa. cxxii. 1. With what delight has he sung,

"How pleas'd and blest was I
To hear the people cry,
Come let us seek our God to-day;
Yes, with a cheerful zeal,
I'll haste to Zion's hill,
And there my vows and honors pay."

No little inconveniences then deterred him, no frivolous excuses were made to absent himself. Well he recollects how he has labored to order and direct everything in subserviency to this, and so to plan and execute his concerns, that he might be early and punctual in his attendance at the house of God. How eagerly he searched the sacred Scriptures; how regularly he read them; how much he remembered; and how willingly he hid them in his heart, that he might not sin against God. Could he not say with David, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thy testimonies are wonderful: I rejoice in them, as one that findeth

great spoil." Psa. cxix. How anxious was he then also to do good! What opportunities did he embrace for this purpose! How many pious and affectionate letters did he send to his friends and acquaintance, to tell them what he experienced, and to recommend Jesus as the altogether lovely, and the Saviour of sinners! Then it was he thought that he could suffer, that he could resign, that he could bear anything, so that he might but bring sinners to him. How often has he said, "O that I could but convert my relations! How happy should I be, could they but see as I do! What would I not do that my neighbors might know him whom my soul loveth? yea, how I long that the whole world, which lieth in wickedness, may repent and be saved! Thus in this, and many other instances, the Christian discovered his first love and his ardent zeal for the promotion of the divine glory. But while many Christians can call to mind these delightful feelings, yet how humbling is it for them to reflect that they do not possess that holy fervor, that sacred zeal, now! How do their minds reproach them! They open the sacred volume, but how cutting is it to read, "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Ah! my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn them out cisterns, broken cisterns,

that can hold no water." Jer. ii. 2, 14. How have they to lament over the coldness of their affections, the unfruitfulness of their lives, and the sad lukewarmness into which they are sunk! Once they could say, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." No sacrifice was considered too great, no difficulty too formidable, no comfort considered so dear but what could be relinquished, so that the honor of God might be but promoted, and the interests of the soul furthered. But how is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed! It is with shame and confusion of face the Christian here looks back, while he thus bemoans himself. "Did I not cheerfully and willingly give myself up to the Lord? Did I not say, Here am I; do with me as it seemeth thee good? When I heard his voice saying, Come out from the world, and be separate, did I not say, Amen, Lord; so give me grace to obey thy will? When sufferings presented themselves, did I not say, Why art thou cast down, O my soul; God is able to support; yea, he will support? When opportunities of usefulness appeared, did I not say, Let me work while it is day? and was I not all activity in the best of services? But now—ah! it is too painful to think of, and the only encouragement is, that He who says, 'I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love,' still invites to return, and says, 'Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.' Rev. ii. 4, 5.

Yes, reader, this sad reverse, this transition from zeal to a state of lukewarmness, is not contemplated or recollected by the Christian without the deepest distress. For the punishment of his conduct, his Lord has, perhaps, withdrawn the smiles of his face: and now he languishes and mourns, and is ready to despond. "O that I were as in months past, when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness! O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat, I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments!" Job xxiii. 3, 4, Job xxix. 2, 3. "Once I walked in the light of his countenance, and found him to be a God near at hand. I took refuge under the covert of his wings, and rejoiced in him as my God. I remember how he supported my soul, directed me in difficulties, supplied my wants, and made his strength perfect in my weakness. O, what delightful views of the glorious perfections of my God did I once enjoy! what transporting views of the excellences and glories of the Saviour! How did the Holy Spirit bear witness with my spirit that I was born of God! But now, how dark, how wretched, how benighted my soul! Now my sins appear in the blackest light, and overwhelm my spirit. Time was when I could submit with patience to every trial; when I could welcome shame, and hail reproach; when, though troubles assailed me, yet I was confident in the Lord, and trusted in the God of my salvation: but now, how

small a thing depresses my spirits! how weak in faith, how little dependence placed on the Lord, and how backward to give up my all to him! O that the Lord would arise, and scatter this darkness; increase my faith, and bless me with the same happy enjoyments, and the same nearness to himself! How sincerely with the poet can I join and say,

"O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame;
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!

"Where is the blessedness I knew,
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?

"What peaceful hours I then enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But now I find an aching void
The world can never fill.

"Return, O holy Dove, return,
Sweet messenger of rest;
I hate the sins that made thee mourn,
And drove thee from my breast."

Thus to many Christians the remembrance of past experience, though profitable, is painful: and the recollection of their former zeal and activity for God shames them under a view of their present lukewarm and uncomfortable state.

There are other parts, however, of his experience

that he remembers with peculiar pleasure; and that is, what he has experienced of the kindness of God in his providence. He had marked out a path for himself, in which he thought he could have travelled with ease and advantage. This, however, he found was blocked up, and another, apparently more circuitous, more difficult, more dreary, appeared. Here he entered, perhaps with trembling steps; he could discern but little before him, and was almost ready to murmur at the darkness that surrounded him. But, renouncing at last his own will, and following the leadings of Providence, although in a variable path, he finds, to his own satisfaction, the propriety of listening to the advice of the wise man: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Prov. iii. 5, 6. Now he sees what a curse it would have been to him if he had followed his own schemes, and what a mercy it is that he has been disappointed in one thing, crossed in another, and diverted from a third. Now he can set to his seal that his word is true; "that no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

With what pleasure can he contemplate that Divine Wisdom and Power which have overruled all the trials and events of his life for good! that from the bitter cup God has made him drink the

sweetest draughts; and that from the pricking thorn he has gathered the most fragrant flowers: yea, that the very rod that smote him yielded the very balm that healed him! Now he can say, "All things work together for good to them who love God, and are called according to his purpose." Many a time has he pronounced this sentence with his lips, or read it, perhaps, in his Bible; but now he has experienced its truth, and rejoices in its accomplishment. Things which once appeared to him so discordant, events which happened so unexpectedly, circumstances which have transpired apparently so opposite to his interest, now he finds have been all subservient to his advantage. Yea, he is so satisfied with the divine proceedings toward him, that, were he to live his time over again, he would not have anything altered as it relates to the divine conduct, for he is fully persuaded that all has been the result of Infinite Wisdom and Love.

Indeed, he is not only pleased, but he is astonished at that goodness and mercy which have always followed him. The goodness of God, that has always supplied him, and the mercy of God, that has always pardoned and prevented him, excite his wonder and gratitude. On his own part he can see nothing but unworthiness in his past life; but on the part of the Almighty he beholds one continual display of wisdom, power, favor, and faithfulness. Well he remembers the kind interpositions of Providence in his behalf in the day of trouble. In an

unexpected way, by an unexpected instrument, he has been delivered. In the paroxysm of his distress he sat down and wept, and with Job was ready to say, "Mine eye shall no more see good." Acute pain, perhaps, that threatened his dissolution; direful disease, about to sweep away his family; false friends designing his ruin, or dreadful calamity hastening to reduce to extreme poverty; these, most likely, have, at one time or other, surrounded him; when, lo! in the midst of expected distress, the kind hand of Providence has appeared, and given such a favorable turn to events, as to cause him again to sing for joy. The shadow of death has been turned into the morning, and he who was on the verge of ruin could say, "I sought the Lord and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. I said I was cast out of thy sight. The waters compassed me about; all thy waves and thy billows passed over me: but I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord." Jonah ii.

Thus the Christian, though he can find no resources of satisfaction from himself or his own conduct, finds perpetual pleasure in reflecting on the ways of God. The recollection of constant supplies, the merciful preventions, the wise directions, and manifold preservations he has experienced, is a source of support even in his darkest hours.

But this will lead us to consider the *advantages* of

remembering past experience; and these are great, a few of which we shall only enumerate. And first, it teaches self-reproof to those who have left their first love. Of Jehosaphat it is said, that he walked in the first ways of his father, David. David's *first* ways are here represented as his best. And of how many may this be said! Recollect, lukewarm Christians, the former days, when nothing kept you from the house of God; when, perhaps, you were the first to propose anything that was good, and the last to decline when anything was difficult. Ah! how did your soul then burn with a holy jealousy for the truth, and what were you not ready to sacrifice, so that you might promote it! What constancy, what zeal, what courage did you manifest! And, ah! is it you, who now say with your conduct, like Peter, "I know not the man?" Is it you, of whom it is said in the world, none can equal him for his love of money, his desire of business, his ambition to be great? Is it you, of whom it is whispered in the neighborhood, he is not so particular, he is not so religious; he is better company, he is more free and lively with us than he was? Is it you, of whom it is said with sorrow in the church, he seldom is found in his place; he is shy and indifferent to those he formerly delighted to associate with. He has lost his zeal. He possesses little or no spirituality. He is never seen in any scene of activity and usefulness. Ah! miserable man! look back, and ask what thou hast been doing. Blush

for thy declension. Think of the happy moments formerly enjoyed, the sweet calm of thy mind, and the bright hope of thy soul. Where are these now? Let conscience speak, and it will pronounce thee wretched. Go thou to thy duty. Return to Him from whom thou hast revolted: still there is forgiveness. Pray for a revival; and, wretched as thou art, there is a hand that will receive, mercy that will forgive, grace that will revive, and power that will protect thee.

To the weak and discouraged Christian, the remembrance of past experience may afford consolation. When Manoah was favored with a divine manifestation, he misconstrued it, and said unto his wife, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God." But his wife said unto him, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have showed us all these things, nor would, as at this time, have told us such things as these." Judges xiii. 22, 23. In like manner may a Christian reason. What mean all my former experience, if I know not the Lord? Should I ever have enjoyed communion with him, and been blessed with his presence, if he had meant to have destroyed me? Should I ever have so ardently longed to be conformed to him, to bear his image, and be devoted to his glory, if I had not tasted that he was gracious? If I am an hypocrite, what mean these fears, these anxieties, respecting my state?

Why so wretched when I fall into sin? Why so happy when kept from it? Why, if I am to be a castaway, do I maintain the struggle? Why did I formerly renounce the world, and how was I able to rise superior to it, if I never was a recipient of grace? If I be deceived, what mean the happy Sabbaths I have enjoyed, the delightful feelings I have possessed when at a throne of grace? Surely, if my heart has never been changed, then from what have all my former views, experience, enjoyments, desires, conflicts, and feelings been derived? Can they be from any other source than grace? And shall grace be given in vain? Will the Almighty, after showing me all these things, abandon me for ever? Can it be? Can reason prove it? Doth Scripture assert it? Surely not. Yes, Christian, you may safely reason thus. You may, with propriety, make use of your former experience in this way. God never gave you light only to make you more wretched: he has not convinced you of sin to terrify you with the thought of its never being pardoned; he has not favored you with a view of his glory that you might know the loss of it. Surely, he has not taught you to struggle with sin, to breathe for holiness, to desire to be his, and then determined to cast you away from his presence for ever. No; this be far from him. You may, therefore, say with David, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul; and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the

health of my countenance, and my God." Ps. xlii. 5.

Further; the recollection of past experience excites thankfulness. When the Israelites gained the victory over the Philistines, Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." 1 Sam. vii. 12. David looks back with thankfulness, and remembers the kind interpositions of Jehovah: "Unless the Lord," says he, "had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said my foot slippeth, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up. I was brought low, and he helped me." Ps. xciv. 17, 18. "Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." Ps. cxvi. 12, 13. Saint Paul contemplates with pleasure the wonderful deliverances wrought on his behalf, when he says, "Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day." Acts xxvi. 22. What reason have you, Christian reader, to use the same language! How has the Lord supported you from your youth, even until now! How often has he supplied your wants, dissipated your fears, sanctified your trials, delivered you from danger, and directed your footsteps! Health, perhaps, has been continued in times of general sickness; your character preserved, notwith-

standing the attempts of malignant foes; your conscience saved from guilt, when surrounded with fiery temptations. With what gratitude must you look back upon these mercies; and with what wonder, too, at the kindness of God, who has caused everything to work together for good!

The recollection, too, of the many delightful opportunities you have enjoyed, the many privileges you have been favored with, the helps you have received, and the mercies that have been bestowed, all call for grateful acknowledgments. Surely, on a review of your past experience, notwithstanding all the trials and discouragements of the way, you must bear testimony to the wisdom of his providence, the greatness of his patience, the faithfulness of his word, and the wonders of his love.

As the remembrance of past mercies should excite gratitude, so it should operate as a spur to duty. You have found, Christian, the yoke of Jesus to be easy, and his burden light. The mildness of his government, the nature of his service, the clemency of his heart, the supplies of his grace, are all powerful arguments to stimulate to diligence. Recollect how little you have done; how imperfectly you have done it; how much you have to do; how little time there is before you; and how soon eternity will open to your view. You can not be too devoted, you can not be too actively employed for so good a Master. "It is high time," says the apostle, "to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than

when we believed." The grace you have received, the many answers to prayer given, the enemies that have been conquered, the difficulties that have been surmounted, should encourage you to go forward. Think not of fainting now, after the battles that have been won, and the glory that has been obtained. Despair not now, after the strength that has been communicated, and the deliverances you have experienced. Relax not now, after you have found the Lord to be faithful. Let the recollection of past favors stimulate to future exertions. Strength shall be given equal to the day. His grace is sufficient, and it is he that hath said, "Trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. Therefore be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Is. xxvi. 3, 1 Cor. xv. 58.

Lastly; learn, from past experience of the divine goodness, to live more by faith, to be more dependent on the faithfulness and promises of God. I appeal to you, O Christian reader, whether the Lord has ever been "unto you as a wilderness, and a land of darkness." He has not given you up to wretchedness and woe; he has not left you to yourself. A thousand and a thousand times he has alleviated your pain, heard your cries, and delivered you in the day of trouble. Why not, then, trust him with all your concerns, and leave, cheerfully leave every event in his hand? Remember, from what you have

already seen, that there is no darkness but he can turn into light, no crooked thing but he can make straight, no enemy but he can conquer, no mountain but he can cause to become a plain. Go then, Christian, to his throne. "Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your heart and mind through Christ Jesus." Phil. iv. 6, 7.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE RELATION OF EXPERIENCE.

It is evident, from the consideration of the powers of man, that he was not made for himself. The social principle he possesses, the sympathy he feels, the faculties of communication bestowed upon him by his Maker, and the relation in which he stands, demonstrate that he was designed to exist not merely as a monument of creative wisdom, but as an instrument to promote the welfare of his fellow creatures. Consider him as unconnected with society: his mind is contracted, his powers have but little room to play, and he becomes subject to an innumerable multitude of evils, which his own wisdom can not shun, nor his power alleviate. The Almighty, therefore, has wisely fitted him for social intercourse, by which his latent energies are exerted, his wants supplied, his mind informed, and the sorrows incident to this present state in some measure lessened.

But if man in general be a creature formed for society, how much more so is the Christian! *He* not only possesses those principles common to every man, and which are adapted for the general benefit of others, while in this world, but he possesses still

higher principles. He is endued with wisdom from above. The immortal soul is the object of *his* concern. He does not merely *find* himself in society, but he wishes to be *active* in it, in order that good may be done, and the glory of God promoted by his instrumentality. Various are the ways by which these noble ends are to be accomplished. Reading the Scriptures, supplication, meekness of spirit, and a holy conduct, he considers as excellent means of doing good. But he beholds *himself* as an object of discriminating favor. He can never forget what great things God has done for him. A sense of these lies warm on his heart. He can not be silent. "Shall all creation speak," he exclaims, "shall all the universe be as one tongue to celebrate the divine benignity, shall all the dispensations of his providence loudly proclaim his glory, and shall I be dumb? No! the very stones would cry out. I have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Others shall learn from my relation the wonders of sovereign grace and redeeming love. "Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise. Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul! Suffer me a little, and I will show thee that I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Ps. li. 15, Ps. lxvi. 16, Job xxxvi. 2.

"Come ye that fear the Lord,
And listen while I tell
How narrowly my feet escap'd
The snares of death and hell.

My drooping head he raised,
My bleeding wounds he heal'd;
Pardon'd my sins, and with a smile
The gracious pardon seal'd.

O may I ne'er forget
The mercy of my God,
Nor ever want a tongue to spread
His loudest praise abroad!"

Dr. STENNETT.

In this way it is that the Christian desires to be useful, and becomes a blessing to society. While he diligently makes use of every means that is appointed, gratitude constrains him to testify to others the obligations he is under to his God. He has nothing to glory in, as it respects himself. His communications are not the communications of the vain boaster, the self-conceited pharisee, or the loquacious but empty professor. He is humbled in the dust under a conviction of his unworthiness. He considers himself as an unprofitable servant: and though his tongue be as the pen of a ready writer, yet his speech is with grace, seasoned with salt. Out of the good treasure of his heart he bringeth forth good things.

But now let us consider more particularly what forms the subject-matter of his conversation in the relation of his experience to others. And, first, the grace of God in his conversion is often a pleasing topic on which he delights to dwell. Amidst the vast variety of subjects that occupied the mind, dwelt on the lips, and employed the pen of the

apostle Paul, that of his own conversion was not the least insisted on and brought forward. What a noble, manly, beautiful, and interesting account does he give when standing before Agrippa! When writing to the Corinthians, he did not forget to relate the goodness of God towards him in this respect. "Christ," says he, "after his resurrection, was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. After that he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But, by the grace of God, I am what I am; and his grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." 1 Cor. xv. 1, etc. Thus, also, when writing to the Galatians, he says, "For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it. And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood," etc. Gal. i. 13, etc. With what a noble triumph does he declare to the Philip-

pians the effects of his conversion! "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ." Phil. iii. 7, 8. Again, in writing to Timothy, how he expresses his gratitude! "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious," etc. 1 Tim. i. 12, 13, etc. But it may be objected, that the apostle's conversion was miraculous, and, therefore, deserved a frequent relation and a lasting record. It is granted it was. But is not the conversion of every impenitent man a kind of miracle? It is a work which can be effected only by the same Power that can create a world, or reverse the general laws of nature. The darkness of the understanding, the obstinacy of the will, the unruliness of the affections, can only be removed by a supernatural influence. The work is not of man. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Jer. xiii. 23. Conversion, therefore, is the work of a *divine hand;* and when a man is brought to see his wretched state by nature, that he merits nothing but wrath, that perpetual misery must have been his portion if he had been left to himself, the change that is produced can not be considered by

him in any other light than as an *extraordinary event;* an event which is of such importance to him as an immortal creature, that it can not fail to impress with gratitude, and stimulate to love. An event which, as it will be celebrated for ever in the world above, can not, will not, be forgotten in this world below.

But it is not the circumstance of his conversion only, but the influence of the Holy Spirit in his sanctification also, that he has to bear testimony of before others. He remembers the time when sin was the object of his delight; when he pursued the pleasures of the world with avidity; when the religion of Jesus and the Gospel of his salvation were ridiculed as a fable. But now he finds himself a new creature: old things are passed away, and all things are become new. He has new perceptions, new affections, new consolations, new expectations, and new companions. But to what does he attribute the happy change? To the force of education, the power of argument, the resolution of self, the exertions of his own mind? No; but to the agency of that Divine Being, whose prerogative it is to illuminate the mind, and sanctify the heart. "Ye are washed," says the apostle, "ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Cor. vi. 11. To this he can subscribe, as being the sentiment of his own mind. "It is the Holy Spirit," says he, "that wrought in me a hatred to sin and a regard to holiness. He took of the things of the Saviour, and

discovered them unto my soul. I was ignorant, proud, insensible, and careless, like others; but now I can testify of that powerful grace, that has, in a measure, subdued the impetuous passions of my corrupt nature. Now I love that which I once abhorred, and hate that which once I loved. Sin appears exceeding sinful. I can no longer indulge it as I once did, no longer look upon it with delight, no longer countenance it in others. But it is to thee, O blessed Spirit, that I am indebted for these views, these feelings; and it is by thy influence alone that I have been enabled to renounce the world, and to persevere in the good old way. Not unto me, not unto me, but unto thy name, be all the glory and all the praise. Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will sing of thy power, I will proclaim thy goodness. Thou hast done great things for me, whereof I am glad. Rejoice with me, ye righteous, and give thanks. Let us praise his name together, and talk of his marvellous grace, that has brought my soul into the path that leads to everlasting life and glory."

The goodness of God in supplying both his temporal and spiritual wants, forms a pleasing subject of relation. Thus the psalmist could say, "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. My mouth shall show forth his righteousness and his salvation all the day, for I know not the numbers thereof. He maketh me to lie down in

green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul, and leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Ps. xxxiv. 4, Ps. lxxi., Ps. xxiii. Thus the apostle Paul could say, "I have all, and abound. I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Phil. iv. 11, Eph. i. 3. Nothing is more pleasant to the Christian than to testify of the divine care which has always been manifested towards him. How often have his necessities been supplied; and perhaps, in the season of extremity, Providence has interposed on his behalf. "Various," says the Christian, "have been the scenes through which I have passed, many dark nights, and dreadful storms; but my God hath supported me in the midst of all. Under the shadow of his wings have I been kept. With what care has he watched over me, with what tenderness beheld me, with what wisdom guided me! How oft, when I have been scheming for myself, and laying out my plans, has he frustrated all, profitably disappointed me, and saved me from unknown trouble and sorrow! At other times, when I have sat pensive, wondering how I should obtain the blessings I desired, and almost ready to despair of possessing them, how has the Lord appeared! He has caused his goodness to pass before me. Friends have been raised up where I expected nothing but enemies; comforts

have been sent in the place of crosses; circumstances which in themselves have appeared unpleasant, have been so overruled by the wise hand of Providence, as to become the means of my support; and that which I dreaded as a trial, has actually become a source of peace and joy. O, how great is his goodness to the children of men! Bless the Lord, O my soul."

But the Christian has not been without his troubles. Many are the afflictions of the righteous; and he has found it true, that man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. But here he hath a pleasing testimony to bear to the kindness of his heavenly Father. He has been supported in the hour of distress, and the house of mourning has been to him the house of prayer and the place of joy. "Never," says he, "could I have thought I should have been enabled to bear what I have borne. Could I have foreseen all, how should I have trembled! But where now is the mountain? Is it not a plain? Where now are the deep waters? Are they not all dried up? How has affliction been sanctified! what a blessing has the cross been to my soul! How true is his word, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee! When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Isa. xliii. 2.

Most Christians have something to say of God's presence afforded them in the trying moment.

Could prison walls speak, could the solitary chambers of sickness, could places of exile, and the habitations of woe, where Christians have been sometimes confined, bear witness, what pleasing and interesting scenes would they unfold! While their enemies have thought them suffering, they have been rejoicing; and though not indeed without feeling the cross, yet how light has it been rendered to them by the smiles of their God! How many have had reason to be thankful for their afflictions! "Glory be to God!" said one, "I never was in such trouble before; and never was I so supported and comforted." Thus also many can say. In the dark and gloomy valley, light hath appeared; flowers have sprung up in the wilderness; and the spot that looked so barren has become verdant and fruitful. "Thou, O Lord," can the Christian say, "hast heard me in the day of my calamity: I have heard thy voice, I have enjoyed thy presence. In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul. Thou hast made the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." Ps. cxvi. 12, 13.

The power of God in conquering his enemies, and delivering him out of his difficulties, forms also another part of his relation. There are few Christians but who can remember a variety of signal deliver-

ances from trouble. These the Christian attributes not to second causes, not to human means, but to the interposition of a Superior Power. One can say, "I was surrounded with danger, and saw no possible way for escape; the scene grew darker every hour, and I was almost ready to exclaim, 'The mercy of the Lord is clean gone for ever,' when suddenly help was afforded me, a refuge was discovered, and the means of safety were unexpectedly given." Another can say, "I was fast bound by the cords of affliction; I struggled to get free, but all in vain: my heart was ready to faint within me; troubles accumulated, the prospect of deliverance every day shortening; when, behold, the hand of Providence appeared in setting me at liberty, and that in such a way as I never thought of!" A third can say, "I was ready to sink under the pungent conviction of my own depravity. I was fearful of falling a victim to the wrath of an offended God. I saw no evidence to conclude that I was among the number of the righteous. 'Miserable, sinful wretch!' said I: 'will not God be glorified in thy destruction? For how can one so sinful and unworthy ever inherit the kingdom of heaven!" But how distinguishing the goodness of God! He appeared for my relief. He dissipated the cloud; I was enabled to look up; I saw on the cross the bleeding Saviour; I beheld the motto written on his breast, 'Behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.' My fears subsided, peace was bestowed,

and I was enabled to arise, and to go on my way rejoicing." A fourth can say, "I was beset with enemies, I was an object of reproach, 'a scorn and derision to them who were round about me.' Malevolence laid a snare; the tongue of slander misrepresented my motives and actions, and hatred opposed my interest in every direction. But how has the Lord verified his word! I heard his voice saying, 'Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him; fret not thyself because of him who bringeth wicked devices to pass.' Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6, 7. He has now made mine enemies to be at peace with me; they have been brought to see the folly of their own conduct; and those who were once violent and injurious are now become quiet and submissive."

A fifth can say, "I was bereaved, and left disconsolate: I thought I could never be happy any more. The world became as a wilderness unto me. 'I am,' said I, 'made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed unto me.' When I lie down, I said, 'When shall I arise, and the night be gone? I am full of tossing to and fro unto the dawning of the day.' Job vii. 3, 4. But how merciful is Jehovah! he healed my wounded spirit, he dried up my tears. I 'forgot my misery, and remembered it as waters that pass away.'" Another

can say, "With what horror have I looked upon the last enemy, death! How often has the thought of it made me tremble! What anxious cares have I had for my friends, my children, and those about me! How painful was the thought of leaving them; how hard to take the last farewell! But now, thanks be to God, he has heard my prayer, he has taken away the fear. 'All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come.' I have listened to the command, 'Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.' I rejoice in the thought of being for ever with him. 'I shall behold his face in righteousness: when I awake, I shall be satisfied with his likeness.'" Ps. xvii. 15, Jer. xlix. 11, Phil. i. 21, Job xix. 26, Job xiv. 14.

Thus have Christians to relate to others various but merciful deliverances from trouble. And how animating is it to hear what God has done for those who trust in him; of faith honored, prayers answered, deliverances wrought, and mercies received!

The relation of our experience may, however, be objected to by some. Religion, say they, is silent. It occupies the heart. Besides, does it not savor of ostentation and vanity to be talking of ourselves? These are futile objections. Religion, it is granted, is not clamorous; but then it is benevolent. It is of a quiet and peaceable nature; but then it is not dumb. She must lift up her voice, but then it is the

voice of mercy and of kindness. She is *life* as well as *peace*. "Not the life of a fury, that hath no peace in it; nor the *peace* of a stone, that hath no *life* in it." Religion, it must be acknowledged, takes its rise in the heart, but then it is not to be confined there. It is of too operative a nature to be inclosed within the boundaries of the understanding. The affections will be moved; and when that is the case, the eye will weep, the tongue must speak, and every power will be exerted and roused to activity.

Besides, it can not savor of ostentation, when the tendency is to exalt the Creator, and abase the creature. Christians have nothing to say to set themselves off, but to magnify the grace of God. The relation they give, the testimony they bear, is founded on gratitude, influenced by love, attended with humility, and has for its end the glory of God, and the welfare of immortal souls.

But the propriety of declaring our experience we may consider further, by observing that it is both implied and commanded in the sacred Scriptures: "Let us consider one another," says the apostle, "to provoke unto love and to good works. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Heb. x. 24, 25. "Go home to thy friends," said our Lord to him that had been possessed with the devil," and *tell* them how great things the Lord hath done for thee." Mark. v. 19. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you

richly, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Col. iii. 16. It is evident, from these passages, that Christians are to assemble together, and no one can suppose that the relation of what God has done for them is to be excluded from their exercises on such occasions. It forms a considerable part of Christian edification, and in some measure resembles the heavenly world, where we shall not only for ever contemplate the work of God in ourselves, but in all those who shall surround the throne.

Reserved, solitary Christians should remember this. If it be a command to assemble ourselves together, is it not wrong wilfully to abstain from the society of the righteous? If it be a duty to communicate, is it not highly improper to be silent? Yet there are some, who, from a singularity of temper, or a timidity almost bordering on sinfulness, seem to be travelling to heaven alone. They join no society, they keep their experience from others, and proceed without mingling their joys and their griefs with those who are going the same way. But such little know how disadvantageous this is to themselves. They have to bear their own burdens; their sorrows, confined within their own breasts, are ready to tear them asunder. Not having communication with others, they are ready to suppose that none are so tried as themselves; and if they do stumble, they have none to interpose and save. Let

such recollect what the wise man has left on record, that "two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to lift him up." Eccl. iv. 9, 10.

Further; we may observe that, in the relation of our experience, we follow the example both of Old and New Testament saints. "We took sweet counsel," says David, "and walked unto the house of God in company." Psalm lv. 14. "They that feared the Lord," says the prophet Malachi, "spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." Mal. iii. 16. "When Jesus was presented in the temple, Anna, the prophetess, coming in that instant, gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." Luke ii. 38. The woman of Samaria, feeling the power of divine grace in her own heart, could not help exclaiming, "Come, and see a man which told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?" John iv. 29. The apostle Paul observes of the Corinthian Church, "When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done to edifying. If all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced

of all, he is judged of all. And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest, and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth." 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25, 26.

Such also are within the promise. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there," says the Saviour, "am I in the midst of them." Matt. xviii. 20. To meet for the purpose of declaring the great things God has done for us, to exalt the Saviour, by relating to each other the wonders of his love, the effects of his grace, the views we have of his dignity, his providences, his word, his life and death; this is surely to meet in his name. Such may expect to enjoy the divine blessing, and to grow in the divine life.

The relief it affords to ourselves is an encouragement to be often found in this work. How pleasant to tell others the way by which we came, the incidents that befel us, the dangers we escaped, and the kind and continual assistance we received from our heavenly Father! How our burdens lose their weight, when others, by their attention to our story and sympathy with our state, take a part on themselves! "When we can diffuse our lives, ourselves, our concerns, so far as to weep with another's eyes; when we have another heart besides our own, both to share and to support our griefs; and when, if our joys overflow, we can treasure up the overplus and redundancy of them in another's breast, so that we can, as it were, shake off the solitude of a single

nature by dwelling in two bodies at once, and live by another's breath."*

But, finally, we may consider what influence it has on others, as well as ourselves. How many may be instructed by the judicious relation of a godly man! How often does it produce light in the understanding of the ignorant! How it resolves cases of conscience, under which the trembling believer had been doubting! and how often does it point out the way the inquiring traveller should go! Does it not frequently operate, also, as a preventive? We hear how the plans of others have failed; how dangerous it is to go near the precipice; how uncertain all things here are; how necessary that our dependence should be entirely on God, and that no confidence should ever be placed on things of an earthly nature. But what consolation, also, is to be derived, when we hear how faithful God has been to his promises; how wonderfully he has appeared for them who looked to him; how mercifully he has alleviated pain, directed in time of difficulty, protected in seasons of danger, and enabled the Christian to persevere through every trial! How does this animate to duty, excite holy courage, and humble confidence! Will not the hearer of such relations be ready to say, "Shame, then, be to me, that I should be so unbelieving, so impatient, so little dependent. Father of mercies, increase my faith, stir up my soul to serve thee with constant zeal and

* South.

holy activity. O, may I trust in thy name, go forward in thy work, and at last reach the mansions of eternal glory!"

We might here subjoin a few observations as to the *manner* of relating our experience. But the reader will find something said on this head in the eleventh chapter, under *Advice respecting Experience.*

CHAPTER IX.

THE AGED CHRISTIAN'S EXPERIENCE.

THERE can not be a more melancholy sight than old age insensible to religion, and hardened in the ways of iniquity. To see a person on the verge of eternity, who has devoted all his life to ungodliness, who is still unmindful of the interests of the immortal soul, deaf to reproof, and abandoned to vice, is of all things the most affecting. Who can behold such an object without pity, without sorrow, without the most lively concern? Who, possessed of the least benevolent feeling, but must say, "O that such were wise, that they understood, that they did but consider their latter end!" Deut. xxxii. 29.

On the contrary, what a pleasing, what an interesting sight to behold the aged turning their back upon the world, walking in the path of godliness, and longing for a better state! "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." Prov. xvi. 31. Piety is always ornamental. In youth, how lovely and amiable! in middle age, how bright and useful! but in old age, how venerable, how commanding, how respectful!

This is, indeed, a crown of glory, which, notwithstanding the decrepitude of the animal frame, and the decay of the intellectual powers, yet adorns the possessor, and reflects a splendor in the circle where he moves. How delightful to behold the aged Christian contemplating with gratitude the divine conduct towards him, and still ardently imploring the continuance of the divine blessing! How pleasant to hear him, with the psalmist, saying, "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth, and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also, when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not, until I have showed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come." Ps. lxxi. 17, 18.

But we are not going to draw the aged Christian as the picture of perfection. Allowing that he may have greater claims both to knowledge and experience than others, yet it must be remembered that he is still in the flesh, and consequently subject to infirmities. Yea, there are some things which are more peculiar to old age than to any other part of human life, and which even the best and wisest Christians in that stage find too powerfully operating in their own breasts. The weakness brought on by length of years often disposes them to be peevish and fretful. A little thing makes an impression on their spirits. They are ready to imagine everything militates against them. They will hardly indulge the young in a sprightly conversation, or a lawful

vivacity. As the powers begin to be contracted, and the senses lose their wonted operation, the mind often sinks into a state of gloom, and this gloom becomes a medium through which they are apt to look at surrounding objects. Hence their complaints that everything is worse than formerly; that the present age is so much inferior to the past.

How often does covetousness also strive to predominate at this time of life! How many fears perplex the minds of the aged, lest, during the remaining small portion of their lives, something should happen to deprive them of their property, or expose them to want! How do they sometimes forget the Providence which hath always attended them, and act as if they thought they were destined to live many years, as if there were many wants to be supplied, and as if the same kind Providence would not take care of them when they shall be once more reduced to that state when they can not take care of themselves.

These things too often injure the minds of many; and hence arises that lukewarmness to be seen in some aged professors. It is a sad thing, however, to behold Christians declining as they draw near the grave. For to be anxious about the world when we are going to leave it, indicates a heart little influenced by grace; and is as inconsistent as for a man to adorn himself with gold and silver just as he is going to bed. While, therefore, the natural infirmities of the aged demand tenderness, and ex-

cite our sympathy, yet we can not but pity and deplore the case of those who make complaints, indulge avarice, and imbibe a worldly spirit.

Aged Christians *in general*, however, have not so learned Christ. They feel these evils, indeed, struggling within them, while they often stop and drop a tear that they who are on the confines of heaven should at any time feel themselves alive to the world. It is not their element. They are seeking a better country; they are desiring to enter into that rest which is prepared for them above. Yes; we are thankful that the Christian church produces so many instances of long-standing monuments of divine goodness, who have been preserved, notwithstanding the rude blasts of opposition and the fiery trials to which they have been exposed; and which, blessed be God, shall yet stand, immovably stand, through death and everlasting ages.

We will now proceed to consider what is more particularly characteristic of the aged Christian's experience.

And, first, we may observe in the aged Christian that wisdom and knowledge which are not generally found in those of younger years. "Days speak, and multitude of years teach wisdom." Job xxxii. 7. They have learned much by their experience; the length of time they have been in the world has taught them knowledge. What revolutions have they witnessed in the world! What changes in families! What vicissitudes in everything about

them! What different appearances have surrounding objects assumed! What strange events have taken place! In what different circumstances, perhaps, do they behold themselves, to those in which they once were! As they have long been in the way, what a multitude of objects have presented themselves to their view! How have they been tried by their own hearts! How often been drawn away by their own corruptions! By what sad experience have they arrived to a knowledge of themselves! How severe, sometimes, has been the conflict with the enemy of souls! How have they been deceived by his insidious snares! How constantly opposed by his attacks! How wearied and exhausted by his fiery temptations! What have they suffered from the world, from its frowns, from its smiles, from its cares, its connections, its allurements! What dark providences, what unexpected and accumulated afflictions, have they, in the course of their long pilgrimage, been called to bear! But have they gained nothing by the view and the experience of all these circumstances? Yes, verily. How has it enlarged their minds! What a different idea have they of things to what they once had! The vanity of the world, the mutability of the creature, the sudden transitions from pain to pleasure, from dignity to contempt, from friendship to enmity, from the calm to the storm, which they have so frequently witnessed in this state of things, make them moderate in their enjoyments, prudent in their mea-

sures, cautious in their pursuits, and suspicious of that security which the world promises to afford. They have seen enough to wean their minds from sublunary things, and to excite them to place their hope and confidence in God only. "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him: He only is my rock and salvation. I will, therefore, look unto him, and not be afraid. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him." Ps. lxii. 5, 6, Is. xii. 2, Lam. iii. 24.

But this leads us immediately to consider the aged Christian in his proper character, as dead to the world. Indeed, everything about him and within him, rightly considered, has a tendency to remind him of his duty in this respect. The voice of nature cries, nor can he be deaf to her calls. His mortal tabernacle, like an ancient dwelling, gives evident signs of decay. Already, indeed, parts of the feeble mansion have fell. Death has begun his attack. It appears in the faculty of vision, over which the last enemy has drawn a veil. It hath filled the countenance with a pallid look. It has benumbed the animal frame. Strength is nearly gone: "the evil days are come, the years wherein there is no pleasure; the grasshopper becomes a burden, and desire fails." Eccl. xii. 1, 5.

What an affecting sight, also, now presents itself! He looks around, but where are the objects that formerly delighted him? Yonder habitation, once possessed by a friend, now becomes the habitation of a

stranger. There dwelt the companion of his youth, and the associate of his middle age; but he is no more. Behold that whole family, that bid fair to withstand many a storm, now all swept away by death! He has seen almost everything decay. O, how he looks back to the spot where he formerly enjoyed happiness, where he beheld the objects of his affection, where his comforts were *thick about him!* He revisits the place, he sighs over the spot. It is all barren now. He can only drop a tear, and return. "He now finds himself almost a solitary being in the midst of a new generation, whose faces he hardly knows. The shades of his departed friends rise up before him, and warn him that it is time to depart. Nature and Providence summon him to be gathered to his fathers. Reason admonishes him, that, as his predecessors made way for him, it is just that he should give place to those who have risen to succeed him on this busy stage; who for a while shall fill it with their actions and their sufferings, and then shall, in their turns, withdraw, and be joined to the forgotten multitudes of former ages.

But, above all, his nearness to heaven admonishes him to leave the world. How long have I to live, said Barzillai to the king, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old; and can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and

singing women? Wherefore, then, should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? Let thy servant, I pray, turn back again, that I may die. 2 Sam. xix. 32, etc.

Thus, too, the aged Christian can say: "What is the world to me? I am sick of its vanities, I am weary of its cares. What are all its grandeurs, its riches, its pomps, its pleasures? These are only golden chains, that would prevent me from soaring to a better world. Why should I, whose body is infirm, whose powers are decaying, whose connections are almost all dissolved, and who am continually receiving warnings of my mortality, why should I still cleave to the world? Indeed, what can there be attracting on earth to one who is every day waiting for heaven, and longing to be in the presence of God in a better world?" Thus the Christian hears the voice of nature, of Providence, and of eternity, calling him away.

But though the Christian is in a measure dead to the world, yet he can take no complacency in himself. However retired, however calm his last days, yet he can not help remembering his past imperfections. Hence we may consider *self-abasement* as entering peculiarly into the experience, and forming a striking part of the mind and character of an aged saint. The retrospect which he takes of his past life fills him with shame; and though it has always been his desire to glorify God, and to be employed in his service, yet he knows that he has done nothing

as he ought to do, and is humbled under a sense of his little fruitfulness. "It resembles the view which a traveller takes from some eminence, of a barren country through which he has passed, where the heath and the desert form the chief prospect, diversified only by a few scattered spots of imperfect cultivation." Let us hear his confession. "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been. What secret backslidings have I been guilty of! How cold have been my affections! What innumerable mercies have I received! but alas! what feeble returns of gratitude! How has the world bewildered and deceived me! and though I have been preserved from the ruin to which it endeavored to draw me, yet how often have I been imposed upon by its smiles, in what difficulties have I been involved by its cares! How little have I done for God! How weak my exertions! Alas! how few characters have been enlightened by my instructions, awed by my reproofs, impressed by my conversation, or reformed by my example! How much time has run to waste! How have I been deceived by procrastination! How has old age crept upon me before I can say anything has been done! And now I begin to be incapable of doing much. O, if my life were to come over again, methinks how different should it be spent as to many things! I am filled with shame that so many years have past away, comparatively barren and unfruitful." Thus the aged Christian is humbled under a view of his past life;

and though there may be a great difference among Christians as to their devotedness of mind and their usefulness in the world, yet they all have to complain. For where is the man, however enlarged his mind, however eminent his piety, however useful his endeavors, but what must feel some uneasiness on reviewing what is past? Can any aged Christian, standing on the verge of eternity, look back with confidence, and say that he has done all that he *could*, all that he *ought;* that there have been no moments of indolence or unconcern; that no evil propensities have ever once been indulged; that he has served God with all that spirituality of mind, that ardent zeal, that constant attention, that he ought; that he has discharged his duty to his fellow creatures with perfect propriety, and that in nothing he could have done more than he has? Alas! on the contrary, the older, the wiser, the holier the Christian is, the more he is humbled and grieved under a view of himself; the more, like Job, he is ready to exclaim, Behold, I am vile; I abhor myself.

Another thing we may distinguish in old age is that cool deliberation, wise caution, and just gravity, not so discernible in the inexperienced. Youth is too precipitate, too confident of its own wisdom, too often ready to assume when it should retire; but age is deliberate, wise, and cautious. How many sad sights has the aged Christian beheld! What numbers he has seen ruined by their rashness, involving themselves and their connections in the deepest distress

by their impatience, their precipitate measures, their self-will! He is therefore determined to view things on all sides, to examine them in all their bearings. He is cool, patient, persevering, knowing by experience how much better it is to wait than to be in haste. Hence, too, his gravity may be accounted for; not because he has lost the fire of youth only, but he has seen the vanity of all things: he feels the consequence of his own errors; he has witnessed a continual scene of vicissitudes. He has beheld earthly enjoyments, like the flowers of the field, raise their heads, expand their leaves, exhibit their bloom, then wither and die. And this, says he, is human life. It is only the world above that is worth seeking. It is only the joy that arises from the hope of the celestial inheritance that is permanent. I sigh for that blessed abode, while I would watch against everything that would take off my attention from that glorious object.

We are not to suppose, however, that the aged Christian is void of pleasure; that the view he takes of life, however humbling, embitters everything to him; and that his gravity and cool deliberation degenerate into apathy and unthankfulness. On the contrary, he experiences a pleasure which it is impossible for a young Christian to possess. What a rich repast does it afford his mind to contemplate the dispensations of Divine Providence! During a course of forty, perhaps fifty or sixty years, what wonderful events have come to pass! He has seen

the lofty mountain become a plain; the most distressing circumstances become the occasion of the most abundant joys; the death of one comfort, the life of others; the very things which were dreaded as the most formidable evils, overruled for bringing about the most extraordinary events.

And what a peculiar pleasure, also, arises from the contemplation of *himself*, as being the *object* of the divine care! He has beheld himself, indeed, circumvented in one place, and tried in another; connections formed that once he had no idea of; his habitation fixed in a part of the world he was long unacquainted with; strangers becoming friends, and friends becoming strangers; little events, so called, leading to those of an important nature: but all under the direction of the Disposer of all things. With what thankfulness can he recollect the evils he has escaped, the comforts he has enjoyed, the various times when his wants have been supplied, and, indeed, the kindness of Providence on a thousand occasions!

The Christian in old age, then, is not destitute of joy. Besides the satisfaction which arises from a wide view of a wise Providence, his very state and situation often shields him. It is true, his infirmities prevent him from relishing many of those comforts which once he delighted in; but then, "if he is a stranger to the vivacity of enjoyment, he is free at the same time from the pain of violent and often disappointed desire. Much fatigue, much vexation,

as well as much vanity, attend that turbulence of life in which the younger part of mankind are engaged. Amidst those keen pursuits and seeming pleasures for which they are envied, they often feel their own misery, and look forward with a wishful eye to the season of calmness and retreat. If old age throws some new distresses into the scale, it lightens, also, the weight of others. Many passions, which formerly disturbed his tranquillity, have now subsided. Many competitions, which long filled his days with disquiet and strife, are now at an end. Many afflictions, which once rent his heart with violent anguish, are now softened into a tender emotion of past woe. In the beginning of life there was room for much apprehension, concerning what might befal in its progress. His hopes were interrupted by many anxieties and fears. Having finished the career of labor and danger, his anxiety ought, of course, to lessen. Ready to enter into the harbor, he can look back, as from a secure station, upon the perils he has escaped, upon the tempest by which he was tossed, and upon the multitudes who are still engaged in conflicting with the storm.

Lastly; we may consider the aged Christian as waiting for heaven. He has nearly finished his work. His race is almost run. The conflict will soon be over. Behold him calmly resigning his relatives and friends to the care of Jehovah. His eye is fixed on the heavenly mansion. He trusts in the merits of the Saviour, and, as he gently passes on

towards the celestial gate, his heart ascends to God in cheerful praises, and with heavenly strains he sings,

"My God, my everlasting hope,
I live upon thy truth;
Thine hands have held my childhood up,
And strengthened all my youth.

"By long experience have I known
Thy sov'reign power to save;
At thy command I venture down
Securely to the grave.

"When I lie buried deep in dust,
My flesh shall be thy care;
These with'ring limbs with thee I trust,
To raise them strong and fair."

Reader, are you drawing near to an eternal world? Has death begun his work? are infirmities increasing? Perhaps you are not among the number of those who are thus exercising faith in the divine promise; but, influenced by unbelief, and distracted with care, are making your last, your most gloomy days. But if you are a Christian, why indulge unnecessary fears? Why add to the infirmities of age the pains of anxiety, the miseries of impatience? Remember what abundant encouragement is held forth for the support of declining age. That gracious God, who has adapted his sacred Word for every state and condition of life, hath not forgotten those who feel the sorrows of an infirm body, and are on the confines of the grave and an eternal world.

How cheering, how appropriate are his promises to such! "Even to your old age I am he, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you." Is. xlvi. 4. "Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season." Job v. 26. "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing." Ps. xcii. 13, 14. Learn to trust, therefore, in him who can alleviate every pain; whose presence and promise can bear you up, when everything else is receding from you. Be not ashamed now to trust in him whom yon have always found faithful. Let the wicked be anxious, and careful, and miserable in this declining season; but you, who have a God, a promise, a guide, a Saviour, you should never despond.

Consider how soon you will be in heaven. It is but a short step you have to take. A few moments, and the clock will strike your last hour. A solemn hour, indeed; but an hour, above all others, the most delightful to you; an hour in which you shall put off the shackles of mortality; the hour in which you shall bid adieu for ever to all the pains and sins, temptations and sorrows, with which you have so long conflicted. For this happy hour, aged Christian, wait with tranquillity. It is fast advancing: it will surely come. Let your heart rejoice in the thought of its arrival. Look up to heaven, that

you may catch a beam of celestial glory; that your countenance may yet shine; and like a faithful servant, listening with eager attention to hear that voice which will shortly say, "Come up hither, and sit down with me on my throne."

While, however, it is the divine will you should be continued here, be ever anxious to set a good example. How many look up to you! How many watch your temper, and observe your conduct! "The aged (says the apostle) should be sober. grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, and in patience." Tit. ii. 2. Be faithful to your post. Watch against the evils attendant on old age. You know the truth; you have long experienced its power. The day is now nearly gone; the evening is at hand: let the sun go down in its glory, and, like that luminary, irradiating surrounding objects, and reflecting its splendor even when itself is no longer visible to the naked eye. So shall many rejoice in your light, and give thanks to the Father of mercies that you have been enabled to adorn his Gospel, and at last to die in his service.

Let young Christians learn to revere the aged. There is always something venerable in age; but there is something beautiful in it, when it is adorned with the Christian graces. "It is indeed infinitely better to be full of grace than full of days; but to be full of days and full of grace, what a venerable spectacle! To be full of years and full of faith, full of good works, full of the fruits of righteousness

which are by Christ, how comely and beautiful!" Draw near, young Christians, to these venerable characters. Sit down at their feet; light your little taper from their flaming torch; ask them the way they have come; respect their report; listen to their declarations: so shall you obtain wisdom from their instruction, prudence from their advice, and gather a thousand fresh motives to go forward in the heavenly path. Remember, too, ever to treat them with tenderness, bear with their infirmities, request their prayers; soften, as much as possible, every care, that they may go down to the grave undisturbed, and bless God in beholding others coming forward to supply the places of those whom age has palsied, or death has snatched away.

My dear reader, do you wish to be happy in old age? Then learn to be wise while young. To give the first-fruits of our time to the god of this world, and the dregs of our lives to the God of heaven—what an insult! No wonder the old age of some is so dreadfully embittered, when they have spent all their lives in a course of rebellion. Learn, then, to give up yourselves immediately to God, and think not of foolishly procrastinating till old age comes upon you. There are very few instances of aged sinners being reformed. Vice hardens; the commission of every sin is like forging a fresh chain to bind the soul in misery. It is adding strength to corrupt nature, and exposing to the greatest danger. The very thought of this should make every man

tremble who thinks the care of his soul necessary, and yet is for deferring it to the last part of life. But supposing remission of sins and repentance to be granted at last, how miserable to reflect on the evils committed, the long train of painful consequences that have followed, and which, perhaps, can never be remedied—no, not in eternity! O, how awful to think that I, by a sinful example, have been the *occasion* of the everlasting ruin of a son, a daughter, a servant, a neighbor! What feelings must I have, what tears must I shed, and what an awful gloom will be cast over old age! Let me entreat, my dear reader, if you be still unacquainted with divine things, no longer to indulge the thoughts of delay. It is religion alone that can make old age pleasant, and death welcome. Holy Spirit, penetrate the hearts of the unconcerned. May they seek thee while thou art to be found. Show them their misery and sinfulness. Lead them to the Saviour of sinners. On him may they now rest, and when the declining days of life shall come, may they go down with peace to the grave, and be for ever with the Lord! Amen.

CHAPTER X.

DYING EXPERIENCE.

DEATH, considered in any light, is a very solemn and awful scene; but it is peculiarly so as it respects the wicked; such are said to be driven away in their wickedness. They do not descend willingly to the grave. They would be happy always to exist in the present state; they possess no regard for a Superior Being, and therefore a future state of heavenly felicity makes little or no impression on their minds. All their happiness is confined to the present world; they are therefore *driven*, or, as it is said, "*chased* out of the world." Job xviii. 18. And what is still worse, they are driven away not only in a *hopeless* but a *sinful* state. Who can contemplate the sad scene without horror? who can bear to witness it without feelings of a nature inexpressible? How awful to behold in his very countenance everything that indicates guilt and misery; to hear his groans and prayers, that his wretched life may be protracted yet a little longer; to witness his whole frame convulsed, his features changing, his lips quivering, his mind overwhelmed with despair! Ah!

"How shocking must thy summons be, O Death!
To him that is at ease in his possessions;
Who, counting on long years of pleasure here,
Is quite unfurnished for the world to come!

In that dread moment, how the frantic soul
Raves round the wall of her clay tenement,
Runs to each avenue, and shrieks for help,
But shrieks in vain! How wishfully she looks
On all she's leaving, now no longer hers!
A little longer—yet a little longer:—
Mournful sight!
Her eyes weep blood, and every groan
She heaves is big with horror. But the foe,
Like a staunch murderer, steady to his purpose,
Pursues her close through every lane of life,
Nor misses once the track; but presses on,
Till, forced at last to the tremendous verge,
At once she sinks to everlasting ruin!"

BLAIR.

But what a different scene do we behold in the death of the righteous character! "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." Ps. xxxvii. 37. Death has no terrors to him—his sins are pardoned; his guilt is removed. No bitter reflections on his past conduct. No anxiety to return and prolong his existence in the present world. No fearful looking for of the day of wrath and punishment. Not that the righteous all depart with the same feelings. The joys of some are not so high as others; yea, some expire with but a small degree of confidence and joy: but this is not the case in general. Few but can say,

when the moment actually arrives, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" 1 Cor. xv. 54.

Indeed, from the great felicity many good men enjoy at death, it seems, as a good writer observes, "as if the weakness of the bodily frame gave occasion to the awakening of some faculty, till then dormant in the soul, by which invisibles are not only believed but seen, and unutterables are heard and understood." In order, however, that we may see how peculiarly welcome it is to the righteous, let us consider the scriptural account of it.

It is called a *departure*. "The time of my departure is at hand." 2 Tim. iv. 7. "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ." Phil. i. 23. He is not violently torn or driven away in a storm, as the wicked, but he departs as one that is set at liberty from his chains. The present world is a state of confinement, when compared to the heavenly world; the soul is here lodged in the body as in a contracted prison. Her powers are cramped, her exertions are fettered, her prospects are bounded. But death unlocks the gate, destroys the chains, and says to the prisoner, go forth, enjoy your liberty; depart to yonder celestial mansion. What an idea does this give us of the happiness of a believer at the hour of death! Here, alas! the chain confines and galls. We feel the sad effects of being immured in a prison where dwells so much darkness and depravity. Fain would the soul leap out and fly;

but what powerful hindrances, what sad restraints! When death, however, arrives, liberty is proclaimed, and a departure is announced to a land where we shall no more be reduced to captivity; where no enemy will oppose, no chain be worn, for ever.

When good men die, they depart as travellers to a better country, or as from an inn to their home. That is truly a happy land where knowledge is diffused, peace enjoyed, sociality indulged, health promoted, property secured, and persons protected. Such a country is heaven, and to depart for such a state must be pleasant and delightful. This, too, is his home: he is not going to a place where he will be a stranger, where it will be uncertain whether he shall be received. It is the kingdom of his *Father*, where everything is provided for his happiness. It is to his own inheritance, purchased and bestowed on him as a free gift by Jesus, his *elder brother*. Who, then, feels distress, who laments, who can be unhappy, at the thought of a departure from a temporary accommodation, where the storm is so often felt, to that glorious state where majesty and splendor indeed *dwell*, but where love and joy for ever *reign?*

The departure of a believer is the departure of the mariner from a distant country to his desired haven. He quits the shores of time to launch into eternity. He has been at a distance from his own land, but how willingly he leaves all to meet his happy connections, to breathe his native air, to taste

the fruit of that delightful soil where all is fertile and rich; and, O, pleasing thought! to return no more, but for ever to be secured from the wasting storm, and the dangerous rocks of this evil world!

Death, to a good man, is called a dissolving of the body. "For we know (saith the apostle) that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved we have a building of God; an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." 2 Cor. v. 1. He considers it only as the taking down of the human frame, to be built on a diviner plan. He does not approach the grave as the infidel or the sceptic, uncertain what will become of him; whether his body shall mingle with the dust, or whether it will be raised again. He believes every atom will be preserved, and, though scattered in a thousand directions, that all shall be collected by the great power of Him who first created him. He has no melancholy ideas of annihilation; he wavers not in dark uncertainty, now hoping, then fearing; now trembling, then presuming; now wishing, then sinking again into the dark gloom of uncertainty. No; these are not the views, the feelings, the scenes attendant on the dying bed of the righteous. He justly considers his body as a tabernacle, a temporary building, that must be taken down at the will of the Creator. He submits to its dissolution. He sees one pin taken out, then another; this part falling, that decaying: but all this he beholds without dismay. He knows there is a building of God

eternal in the heavens, and cherishes the sweet hope of body and soul being again united, to part no more.

Further; the death of the righteous is compared to rest. "He shall enter into peace; they shall *rest* in their beds." Isa. lvii. 2. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; they shall rest from their labors, and their works do follow them. Rev. xiv. 13. There the wicked cease from troubling; there the weary be at rest. Job iii. 17. With what pleasure must a good man contemplate the hour when he is called to put off the armor, to lay aside the buckler, the shield, and the helmet for ever! Here the conflict is often both long and painful. Every step is contested. His heart at times sinks within him for fear. He feels his weakness, and trembles lest he should be suffered to desert the great Captain of his salvation. But when death arrives, with what joy is he inspired at the thought of being no more exposed to danger! Now, says he, I have done; the battle is over, the victory is won. No more shall I feel the fiery darts of Satan; no more shall I be subject to the attacks of an evil world; no more be deceived by a depraved heart. I shall now *sit down* with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

Again; the death of the righteous is represented in the sacred Scriptures under the idea of sleep. "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep; that ye sorrow not

even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." Thess. iv. 13, 14. So of Stephen it is said, notwithstanding he was stoned to death, that he fell asleep. Acts vii. 60. What a pleasing idea does this afford us of the death of a believer! Who, after labor and conflict, danger and toil, trouble and opposition, fears sleep? What more desirable? what more refreshing? How it strengthens the body, how it relieves the mind! Thus a good man lies down, and forgets all his toils. Now his sorrows, his pains, terminate for ever. Now the troubles of the day are done with. Now the conflict ceases, no more to return. Let it be remembered, too, that it is not in the house of an enemy, a place of danger, where he reposes. He "sleeps in Jesus," saith the apostle. Happy situation! lovely security! Where can an immortal spirit rest better? Blessed Redeemer! who can be afraid of falling into thine arms? Who fears to sleep under thy protection? If death be no more than this, then happy are thy servants when called away from this vale of tears. If this be the privilege peculiar to thine then, Lord, let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.

To confirm the ideas above suggested relative to the dying experience of the righteous, let us now advert to some few examples in which we shall see these remarks exemplified. Behold the patriarch

Jacob drawing near to the gates of death. With what composure he exclaims, "I die, but God shall be with you. I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord!" His sons gather round him; he blesses them. He talks of death without fear; he beholds its approach without alarm. He willingly resigns his spirit, gathers up his feet into the bed, and expires. Gen. xlix. 33.

Behold *Moses*, in his latter end, triumphing in God, and bearing a noble testimony to his providence and grace. "Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, as the showers upon the grass. Because I will publish the name of the Lord, ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the rock; his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment. A God of truth, and without iniquity: just and right is he." Deut. xxxii. 1, etc. To die with a mind impressed with such noble sentiments as these is to die happy.

See a *Joshua*. How calmly he speaks of his own death! but with what energy he dwells on the good providence of God to him and the people! "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth, and ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you: all are come to pass unto you, and not one

thing hath failed thereof." Joshua xxiii. 14. Glorious testimony of a dying saint!

Witness a *David.* "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow." 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. His views of death we may easily collect from his own words. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." Ps. xxiii. 4. As if he had said, "It is death, indeed, that is before me; but it is but the *shadow* of death; there is no substantial evil in it: the shadow of a serpent will not sting, nor the shadow of a sword kill. It is the *valley* of the *shadow;* deep, indeed, and dark; but the valleys are fruitful, and so is death itself fruitful of comforts to God's people. It is but a *walk* in this valley—a gentle, pleasant walk. The wicked are chased out of the world, and their souls are required; but the saints take a walk to another world as cheerfully as they take their leave of this. It is a walk *through* it; I shall not be lost in the valley, but arrive safe at my desired abode." (See Henry on Ps. xxiii. 4.)

Behold a *Simeon.* He had long been waiting for the consolation of Israel. At last he appears. The good old man takes the babe in his arms, and with ecstasy prays, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word. For mine

eyes have seen thy salvation." Luke ii. 28, 30. Life to him was no longer desirable, and death appeared as a welcome messenger, now he had been favored with the presence of the Saviour.

Nothing can exceed the holy joy and triumphant language of the great apostle *Paul*, in the view of death and an eternal world. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus. I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing." 2 Tim. i. 12, Acts xxi. 13, 2 Tim. iv. 6, 7, 8. Happy apostle! how little terrific must death have been in thy view, and how unimportant the passing scenes of this world, when compared with the glorious objects of that to come!

Behold a *Peter*. "I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance. Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me." 2 Pet. i. 14, 15. Death appeared no more to him than putting off his raiment, and lying down to rest. He knew he had not followed

a cunningly devised fable, but that, after death, there was an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, to be enjoyed by him, and all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Such was the hope, such the prospect, of these illustrious characters. And to them what a long list might be added of primitive Christians, of martyrs, of noble confessors, who died in the faith; who indeed considered themselves as strangers and pilgrims here; who desired, and at last enjoyed, a better country!

But lest any should imagine that such happy experience belonged only to those characters whom God raised up in early times for arduous and important work, and, being inspired of God, naturally enjoyed more than others when living, and was more supported in their dying moments, let us come down to later times, and we shall find that the same grace was exemplified in the solemn hour of dissolution.

Mr. Halyburton, when dying, thus addressed those around him: "Here is a demonstration of the reality and power of faith and godliness. I, a poor, weak and timorous man, once as much afraid of death as any one; I, who was many years under terrors of death, come, in the mercy of God, and by the power of his grace, composedly and with joy to look death in the face. I have seen it in its paleness, and all the circumstances of horror that attend it. I dare look it in the face in its most ghastly shape, and hope to have, in a little time, the victory over it.

Glory, glory to him! O, what of God do I see! I have never seen anything like it! The beginning and end of religion are wonderfully sweet! I long for his salvation, I bless his name! I have found him! I am taken up in blessing him! I am dying, rejoicing in the Lord! O, I could not have believed that I should bear, and bear cheerfully as I have done, this rod, which hath lain on me so long. This is a miracle. Pain without pain! You see a man dying a monument of the glorious power of astonishing grace!" Some time after, he said, "When I shall be so weakened as not to be able to speak, I will give you, if I can, a sign of triumph when I am near to glory." This he did; for when one said, "I hope you are encouraging yourself in the Lord;" not being able to speak, he lifted up his hands, clapped them, and quickly after expired.

When Mr. Henry was dying, he said to a friend, "You have been used to take notice of the sayings of dying men; this is mine: That a life spent in the service of God, and communion with him, is the most comfortable and pleasant life that any one can live in this world."

Dr. Evans, in his last moments, said, "All is well. All is well."

Dr. Watts said, "I bless God, I can lie down with comfort at night, unsolicitous whether I awake in this world or another."

"I am full of confidence (said Dr. Doddridge); there is a hope set before me: I have fled, I still fly

for refuge to that hope. In him I trust. In him I have strong consolation, and shall assuredly be accepted in the beloved of my soul."

"Do not think (said Mr. Hervey) that I am afraid to die! I assure you I am not. I know what my Saviour hath done for me; and I want to be gone. But I wonder and lament to think of the love of Christ in doing so much for me, and how little I have done for him." A little before his death, he said, "The great conflict is over! Now all is done!"

Dr. Gill said, "I have nothing to make me uneasy." And his last words were, "O my Father! my Father."

"It will not be long (says Mr. Toplady) before God takes me; for no mortal man can live (bursting into tears) after the glories which God has manifested to my soul."

Mr. Ryland cried out, "Happy, happy, happy! O, what ease of body! O, what ease of soul!"

Mr. Brewer said, "O, what a world am I going to! Here all is sin, and all is sorrow, but there, everlasting joy. Jesus is standing to receive my spirit. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

These are testimonies from public characters; but what multitudes of private Christians have experienced the same support! "You will excuse my saying much," said a good man whom I visited in a dying hour, "but I declare before God, he is my delight, he is my all. It is done: rejoice with me. It

is done. This left arm is dead; but I am not alarmed; I am not alarmed. I am no more afraid of death than an infant just come into the world. I have no doubt but my name is written in the book of life. Hasten it, Lord. Cut short thy work, if it be according to thy will. Tell others, when I can not—not that I want to have my name on a pillar, but for the good of others. Praise! Praise! Praise!

It would be easy to enlarge this list; but the reader may consult the obituary in our religious and periodical publications for pleasing accounts of this kind. We shall only just stop to ask, whether the death-beds of infidels and the profane can produce anything like this? Instances, indeed, of apathy and awful unconcern are numerous; but is it not to the sacred religion of Jesus that we are indebted for the bright scenes, the manly fortitude, the holy joys we often witness in a dying hour?

But it is natural for us to inquire into the causes of such a happy experience. What prospect is there afforded by Christianity that makes death so welcome? What real grounds have Christians for rejoicing in this hour? And, first, we observe, it is a matter of the highest joy that they are leaving a world where there is so much depravity, for a world where all is perfection and holiness. Of all the sources of grief to a good man, none is equal to that of sin. It is this which often breaks his peace, interrupts him in duty, and is a barrier to his intercourse

with God. Wherever he goes, in whatever situation he is fixed, or whatever changes take place as to other things, his imperfect and sinful nature still remains. He can not divest himself of this; and what is still more painful, his corruptions break out again, after, perhaps, he thought they were nearly subdued. Death, therefore, becomes very desirable to terminate a conflict which is so distressing. To get rid of an enemy which is always assaulting us must be no small joy. The thought of sinning no more is delightful to a good man. If he could live in the present state but for a year, a month, a day, an hour, without sin, it would be his highest joy. With what willingness, then, can he meet death, which will remove him from every occasion of sin; which will deliver him from every temptation, every corruption, and introduce him to a world where holiness and happiness perpetually dwell!

Again; the Christian rejoices at the thought of death, because he leaves all his troubles. A wicked man may well tremble at death, because it is comparatively the beginning of his sorrows; but the righteous, on the contrary, may rejoice, as it is the beginning of his joys. It is true, that even in the present state his happiness has sometimes been great; but permanent joy is reserved for another world. With what pleasure may he look forward and say, "Soon I shall have done with all the troubles of life. No more doubts and fears. No dark and cloudy days. No more weary steps and painful

conflicts. Here how sudden, how numerous the vicissitudes of life! One difficulty succeeds another. No dependence to be placed on earthly good. The best frames soon change, and the greatest trials attend the greatest comforts. But a little while, and I shall be delivered from all. There is a glory to be revealed. God will wipe away all tears from mine eyes, and there shall be no more curse, no more death; neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain; the days of my mourning shall be ended, and my God shall be my glory for ever and ever." Rev. xxii. 4, 5.

But is not death in itself awful and terrific? And are not believers men of the same feelings, the same fears as others? Truly so, as it respects themselves; but the terror of death is in a great degree removed, as they have the promise of a safe guide through the dark valley. Angels are sent forth to minister to them who are the heirs of salvation. "These encamp about them in the time of their life, and surely they will not leave them in the day of their death." But the Lord of angels has promised to be with them in that trying moment. "I will never leave thee," is the kind declaration made to every saint. He who does not leave them in their common troubles, will not leave them now, when everything around them is incapable of affording them support. With what composure, therefore, may they leave themselves in his hands, and trust to his goodness and power to bring them safe through! Yes, Christian, you may say, without presumption, with the poet:

"Though I walk through the gloomy vale,
Where death and all its terrors are,
My heart and hope shall never fail,
For God my Shepherd's with me there."

WATTS.

Besides, they are going home to their best Friend. The child is not afraid of being sent for from school to his parents; and death is but God's servant, which he sends to invite his children home. No wonder the Christian rejoices at the thought of going where his Father dwells, where his brethren are, and where he shall enjoy perfect liberty, holy familiarity, and endless pleasure. "In my Father's house are many mansions (says our Lord); if it were not so, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." John xiv. 2, 3. With a firm belief in these delightful declarations, with what joy can a Christian leave the world, especially when he considers that he is not merely to be *admitted* but *received* to glory; received with the acclamations of the heavenly hosts; received by Christ with the highest joy and the strongest love; received into the presence of Him whose favor constitutes the glory and happiness of the celestial world.

But what, above all, affords a ground of rejoicing is, that the felicity of the heavenly kingdom is never to end. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel,

and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and *so shall we ever be with the Lord.*" 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17. There shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever. Rev. xxii. 5. What delightful prospects do these Scriptures afford us of a future state! Here we are sometimes interrupted in the midst of our joys by the recollection that they are so short-lived. A succession of hopes and fears, of pains and pleasures, attend us in this mortal state. However calm the present moment, we must prepare for the storm. However happy, we must remember we are still in the wilderness, subject to innumerable changes and perpetual trials; but how consoling for the Christian to reflect that he is travelling to a better country, whence he shall not return, where he shall go no more out! What terrors then can death have for the man whose hopes centre in that glory which shall never fade? What happiness in the thought, that every moment brings him nearer to that bright abode where he shall for ever enjoy the divine presence! An eternity of happiness! How little must everything appear in this world, when contrasted with this! How insignificant all the trials of the way, when we consider the felicity of the end! How welcome death to introduce us to the grand scene!

How bright the Christian appears as he draws nearer to it! What a majesty in his death! What a glory in his hope! "As the rivers roll the smoothest the nearer they approach the ocean, as the rose smells the sweetest when dying, as the sun appears most glorious when setting, so it is with the Christian." Hear his expiring language! Farewell all terrestrial scenes! I know that my Redeemer liveth. What a happy change! Earth for heaven, time for eternity, conflict for victory, sorrow for uninterrupted joy! Into thy hands, O immortal Saviour, I commit my spirit. Thine it is to conduct me through the valley; thine to raise to glory; and thine to crown me with eternal joy. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Even so come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

Thus we see what grounds the Christian has for rejoicing at the thought of dissolution. It may be objected, that however good these grounds, yet many even of the righteous die without any remarkable sensation of joy; yea, some die in darkness and fear, others die suddenly, without leaving a verbal testimony. This certainly must be granted. But let not the weak Christian be discouraged on this account. Some, it is true, are said to be saved so as by fire; and some are saved who have remained in a doubting state almost to the last; but I believe these will be found to be but few compared with the generality. God has, indeed, suffered some of his most useful and most eminent servants to depart without any great evidences of triumph and joy; but this is

wisely permitted, for were such always to die in triumph, then the weak and fearful would be ready to despond, and imagine, perhaps, that they were not the objects of divine love, because they are not favored with high joys in that trying hour. It is also good to remember that our frames do no affect our state. The salvation of the soul may be secure; but the joys of that salvation may, for wise reasons, be suspended. We may die safe, though we may not die happy. There are many things that may press hard on the mind even of a good man at that season. The thoughts of his family, separation from dear and intimate friends, the recollection of besetting sins, spiritual sloth and decay, the awfulness of eternity, the pains of death, natural timidity; some or all of these may affect the mind to a great degree; but, notwithstanding, I believe it is generally found that believers are wonderfully supported in the hour of death. In the course of my ministry, and the visits I have paid to dying beds for several years, I have found but few who were truly serious, but what, if they had not all a high degree of joy, yet were resigned to the will of God, bearing testimony to his goodness, in fulfilling his word, and being with them even to the end. It is, however, at all times, a different scene from the death of the wicked. They die trembling in an awful suspense and dark uncertainty, or presuming that all will be well, while their hearts are still hardened in sin; but the righteous depart in peace, and often in triumph

and ecstacy, with a hope full of immortality and joy!

And now, my dear reader, do you wish to die comfortably? Then live *circumspectly*. Not that this can merit heaven; but a worldly, careless, lukewarm spirit is not a proper frame to die in. "Let it be your constant care," says Mr. Boston, "to keep a clean conscience, a conscience void of offense toward God and man. Acts xxiv. 16. Beware of a standing controversy betwixt God and you, on account of some iniquity regarded in the heart. When an honest man is about to leave his country, and not to return, he settles accounts with those he had dealings with, and lays down methods for paying his debts in time, lest he be reckoned a bankrupt, and be attacked by an officer when he is going off. Guilt lying on the conscience is a fountain of fears, and will sting severely when death stares the criminal in the face. Hence it is that many of God's children, when dying, are made to wish passionately and desire eagerly that they may live to do what they ought to have done before that time. Wherefore, walk closely with God, be diligent, strict and exact, in your course; beware of a loose, careless, and irregular conversation, as ye would not lay up for yourselves anguish and bitterness of spirit in a dying hour. And because, through the infirmity cleaving to us in our present state of imperfection, in many things we offend all, renew your repentance daily, and be ever washing in the Redeemer's blood. As

long as ye are in the world, ye will need to wash your feet, (John xiii. 10,) that is, to make application to the blood of Christ anew, for purging your consciences from the guilt of daily miscarriages. Let death find you at the fountain, and, if so, it will find you ready to answer its call."

Believer, wait patiently. "All the days of my appointed time," says Job, "will I wait till my change come. Job xiv. 14. Stand at your post till God calls you; for "it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." Lam. iii. 26. A few more storms, a few more dark and cloudy days, and you shall enjoy the rest that remaineth for the people of God. It is but a little while, and you shall lay aside the helmet for the crown, the garments in which you sustain the conflict for the white robe, and the sword for the palms of victory! The enemy shall no more be seen; for the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joys upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Is. xxxv. 10.

While, however, you exercise patience, *watch* constantly. Be like unto men that wait for their lord, that, when he cometh and knocketh, you may open to him immediately. Luke xxi. 36. Remember you are still in an enemy's land, and that no past experience, no long standing in the church, no exemptions which you have hitherto had from public falls, can insure you in time to come without divine grace.

Many have carried it well till nearly the last, when one unguarded moment, one imprudent step, has been the occasion of much grief, and caused them to descend to the grave in sorrow. Watch, therefore, to the end. The enemy, perhaps, will be more artful, more violent, more anxious to injure you, in proportion as you draw nearer to your home, where he knows you will be beyond his reach. Sit loose to the world. Remember you are a pilgrim, and therefore you are not to be *only looking*, but *going* forward. Watch against everything which would detain you by the way. Take leave of all sublunary objects, and thus, forgetting the things that are behind, press forward towards the mark for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus. Phil. iii. 14.

And now, reader, let me ask, have you reason to believe that you are travelling to this better country? No doubt you wish to die happy; but remember this can not be the case while sin is unrepented of. The life of a wicked man is often a life of gaiety, thoughtlessness, and presumption; but his death is an awful scene of horror and misery. No light from heaven irradiates his dying moments. It is all thick darkness, for there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. To die in poverty, without friends, without attendants, all solitary, without any kind aid to wipe off the cold sweat that bedews the face, without any affectionate help to alleviate pain, or sympathize with misery, is considered as a grievous and deplorable state; but, alas! what is this?

This is of but little consequence, when compared to the state of him who dies without God, without an interest in him who alone is able to save. Reader, *examine thine own heart.* Remember how short thy time is. A little longer, and thy body will be in the grave, and the soul—where shall I say? In heaven? No, if thou diest without repentance! On earth? No. But in the dark abodes of eternal despair. For the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. Ps. ix. 17. Arise, therefore; cry for mercy! The door is not shut. Now is the day of salvation! Flee to the refuge set before thee. Behold a Saviour! He is willing to receive, willing to pardon, willing to bless. Believe in him, and thou shalt be saved; but if thou reject him, thou art undone for ever!

CHAPTER XI.

ADVICE RESPECTING EXPERIENCE.

RELIGION, like everything else that is valuable, has its counterfeit. There are errors nearly resembling the truth, doctrines that are apparently deduced from the sacred Scriptures, but which are in reality the doctrines of devils; precepts which some would have us believe to be of God, but which, in fact, are only the inventions of men. So likewise there may be an experience, so called, which pretends to be of a divine and gracious kind, but which, when properly investigated, will be found to savor not of God, but of corrupt nature. It is, then, of importance that we examine ourselves, lest we should be deceived; and "that we should see the difference between the holy and the profane, and discern between the unclean and the clean." Ezek. xliv. 23. We are commanded, also, to prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good. 1 Thess. v. 24. It is my intention, therefore, in this chapter, to give some advice respecting this important subject; premising, however, that nothing is intended to discourage the weak, or reflect upon the ignorant, but rather to expose the hypocrite, and detect the

enthusiast, whose conduct and spirit so often grieve and injure the minds of the truly serious.

First Advice: *Endeavor to distinguish between counterfeit and genuine experience.* A false experience may arise from several causes. Some have substituted the reveries of their own imagination for gracious experience. They have talked of extraordinary impressions and revelations; they have imagined, because they have comfortable frames, that their sins were pardoned, and have been confident they should go to heaven, while at the same time there has been little or no proof of their ever having been made new creatures in Christ Jesus. We know, also, how busy Satan is in deceiving mankind. By his insinuations he can make men believe that they are real Christians, when they are not. He can make presumption appear as strong faith, forwardness as zeal, or the fear of man as prudence. He cares not for men making a profession, attending a place of worship, or even confessing their sins, as long as they do not *forsake* them. They may talk of religion, believe in some of its doctrines, and attend to the performance of some duties, and yet be strangers to a vital change. Yea, this great enemy may puff them up with an idea of extensive knowledge, and such an experience which is beyond every other person's, so that they may imagine they stand high in the church; when, alas! their minds have never been savingly enlightened in the knowledge of divine things.

Mere natural impressions may sometimes be taken for the work of the Spirit of God. Sublime descriptions, awful denunciations, delightful representations of the heavenly world, the tone of the voice, the powers of eloquence, may greatly affect the mind, and cause people to imagine that they are actually converted, when their own conduct testifies to the contrary. Thus it is said that Ezekiel "was unto the people as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and could play well on an instrument: they heard his words, but they did them not." Ezek. xxxiii. 32. And it is to be feared there are too many who have their favorite ministers, their particular places, on this account. There is something pleasing or striking in the manner of the preacher, something agreeable in the place or the people, that attaches them; and, thus pleased, they are too apt to suppose all is well, while these very people can not, with any degree of propriety, render a reason of the hope that is in them.

There have been many, also, who have made pretenses to extraordinary communications with the Deity; prophets and prophetesses, who, according to their own account, have dreamed dreams, seen visions, heard voices, and pretend to predict future events, as if inspired of God for that purpose. They have set themselves up as oracles, as the peculiar favorites of heaven; while, alas! nothing has been more clearly proved than that they were deceived

by their own imaginations, or carried away by vanity or self-conceit. Some people, not, indeed, so infatuated as these, have talked of great spiritual discoveries: they have had lively ideas of the form of Christ's person; have heard, or thought they have heard, him speaking to them; have had singular dreams, by which they have been imprudently guided, and yet boasted that they were under divine direction.

Some good people, also, have been deceived. A weak temperament of body, nervous disorders, and a strong fancy, have led them to imagine strange things. Sometimes, when depressed in spirit, they have been ready to think God was about to leave them; or, when circumstances have transpired different to what they expected, then they thought that Providence was fighting against them. So, on the other hand, when their comfort has increased, and they have felt themselves stronger in body, and their spirits better, then they have talked of the light of God's countenance being lifted upon them. Not but what there may be occasional joys and griefs, according as God is pleased to manifest or withdraw himself from his people. But I am confident that a great deal of what is called distressing experience, arises from a weak frame of body. If such would pay attention to their health, live less upon their frames, and more upon the promises, it would be abundantly better for them, both as to body and soul.

Others have been guided too much by impulses, or sudden thoughts darting into their minds, without properly examining the tendency, and without recollecting that Satan can inject Scripture, or that passages may be brought to our recollection by the occasion of some circumstance or object remotely connected with it. This may or may not be of God; and therefore extreme caution should be used. A supernatural influence, no doubt, is felt by all God's people; but this influence does not in general impel us to do an action precipitately, or without thought.

They, too, I think, act improperly, who open their Bibles to choose a text, and are determined to be guided according to the passage they shall first set their eyes on. Nothing can be more inconsistent. It may lead either to presumption or despair. The sense of Scripture can not be obtained in this manner, except it be a detached passage, which are very few, compared with the Bible at large. In this way, Scripture may be made to speak anything; and for people to talk of their experience, and of God's directing them, when they adopt such a practice as this, is really absurd, and can not but excite our pity for those who are thus deluded.

I have just hinted at these things, that we might see how men may be deceived as to religious experience. And when we consider, as one observes, "that we can see but a little way into the depths of man's heart; that there are so many ways whereby persons may be affected without any supernatural

influence; that the natural springs of the affections are so various and so secret; that so many things have oftentimes a joint influence on the affections and the imaginations;" it ought to make us examine ourselves, lest, after all, we should be only as the sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. "Indeed, the surprising concourse of affecting circumstances, the extraordinary coincidence of things in the course of our thoughts, the subtle management of invisible malicious spirits, are such, that nothing will be sufficient to guide us safely through this labyrinth and maze, without our closely following the clue given us in God's word." Let us proceed, then, to ask,

In the first place, whether our experience accords with the will and word of God? This is the true balance in which all must be weighed. Whatever is deficient here, however it comes recommended, however specious, however it resembles the experience of the wise and good, must be rejected. The Bible is the only standard to which our experience, as well as principles, must be brought. Whatever we feel, whatever impressions or views we have, if they are not countenanced by the Scripture, we may suspect that they are not the effects of the operations of the Spirit. It is a sad sign, therefore, when professors are guided by their own fancies, by the opinions of others, or merely by some impressions, rather than by the word of God; and still worse when they grow confident, have no doubts, but seem full of assurance and certainty about the

genuineness of their experience, while they neglect the rule, or are unwilling to be tried by it. Now, if our experience be genuine, if our views and feelings arise from a right source, we shall be willing to submit to this test. We shall not use it partially. We shall be fearful of being deceived. We shall pray to God to search us and try us. Here, then, we observe a difference between a deluded professor and a real Christian. One is guided by a rule of his own making, the other willingly submits to that which is made for him. One follows his own will and imagination; the other is guided by the directions and decisions of the holy Scriptures.

Secondly: let us ask, Whether our experience tends to promote humility? Professions of humility, indeed, may be common where there is none in reality. "There are many (says Mr. Edwards) that are full of expressions of their own vileness, who yet expect to be looked upon as eminent and bright saints by others, as their due; and it is dangerous for any so much as to hint the contrary, or to carry it towards them any otherwise than as if we looked upon them as some of the chief of Christians. There are many that are crying out about their wicked hearts, and their great shortcomings and unprofitableness, and speaking as though they looked on themselves as the meanest of the saints, who yet, if a minister should seriously tell them the same things in private, and should signify that he feared they were very low and weak Christians, and thought

they had reason solemnly to consider of their great barrenness and unprofitableness, and falling so much short of many others, it would be more than they would digest; they would think themselves highly injured, and there would be a danger of a rooted prejudice in them against such a minister." But if our experience be of a right kind, we shall not *seem* to be humble only, but shall actually be so. Observe what effects the discoveries and experience of the most eminent saints had on them. "I have heard of thee (says Job) by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job xlii. 5, 6. "Behold (says the psalmist), I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Ps. li. 5. "Surely (says Agur) I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man." Prov. xxx. 2. And the great apostle Paul calls himself the chief of sinners. Eph. iii. 8, 1 Tim. i. 15.

Now, if what we feel or have discovered, if what we call our experience, tends to make us think highly of ourselves or to boast of our attainments, we may be assured this is not of God. There is much talk by many persons of *deep experience;* but I know of no deep experience that is not deep in humility. Humility is highly spoken of in the Scriptures. It is the grand tendency of the whole system of divine revelation to humble man; and where there is no humility there is nothing of God,

of sound experience, of true religion. Does our experience, then, promote this in us? Are we more and more self-abased under a view of the holiness of God, the spirituality of the law, the excellences of the Saviour, and the depravity of our hearts? Do we, the more we know, the more experience we have, the longer we live, think less of ourselves? Are we lying in the dust, and, notwithstanding all our progress, still saying, God be merciful to me a sinner? Are we so humbled as to be glad to be anywhere, or be anything, for God? Do we remember our ways, and all our doings, and loathe ourselves in our own sight, for all the evils we have committed? Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. Then, indeed, we have reason to believe that we are not deceived, that we are divinely taught; for the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart he will not despise. Thus saith the Lord, the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Isa. lvii. 15, Ps. li. 17.

Further: let us ask, Whether our experience teaches us to bear with others? To talk of happy communion with God, of enlargements of mind, and animation of soul in his service, of fresh discoveries of the perfections of God, of the extensive views we have of his word and providences, and yet to be contracted and bigoted as it respects others, is a

strange thing. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." James iii. 17. What shall we say, then, of those who are perpetually railing against others, and that because they do not happen to agree with them in every inferior circumstance? What can we think of the experience of those who are ready to exclude every body from the kingdom of heaven but those of their own party? Can their experience of divine love be very great who take a pleasure in searching out and talking of the infirmities of others? Let us not deceive ourselves; if the spirit of malignity, envy, illiberality, opposition, predominate in us, however we may talk of our intercourse with heaven, we evidently manifest we are still of the earth. These are not the dispositions of the Gospel; "for the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." Gal. v. 22, 23. The more communion we have with God, the more we shall pity the weakness, and bear with the infirmities, of his people. Reader, if thou art a poor bigoted soul, speaking well of nothing but what is of thine own party, taking pleasure in puzzling the weak with unnecessary and useless subjects, and quarrelling about trifles, how dwelleth the love of God in thee? Where is that mildness, that quiet and peaceable behavior, that tenderness to others, that liberality

of soul, which characterize those whose experience is genuine, and whose hearts are right with God? Surely, if we feel as we ought to do, we shall know something of that charity which suffereth long and is kind, which does not envy, nor vaunt itself; that is not puffed up; that doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; that beareth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things. 1 Cor. xiii. 1, etc.

Again: Does our experience excite us to be ardent in devotion, and constant in our attendance upon the ordinances of God? There may, it is true, be an appearance of devotion, and a punctual attendance on public worship, where there is no experience of the power of religion. But then this is *appearance* only. There is no sincere motive. There is no real love to the ordinances. There is no corresponding fruit. Now, a good man experiences so much of his own helplessness, sees so much the necessity of divine assistance, that he highly esteems and gladly attends upon the ordinances of divine institution with the most sincere desire to have his mind more informed, his heart more deeply impressed, and his affections raised above all earthly things. There are some who talk much of their being taught of God, and of their having such revelations and experiences, as to have no occasion for the means. "We have (say they) an unction from the Holy One, and know all things. We need not that any man teach us.

We have already obtained the blessing. It is within us." Ordinances, therefore, to them are considered as useless. Sabbaths are no more than other days. Prayer or petition is scarcely necessary. The house of God may or may not be attended. In a word, the supposed idea of their having Christ in them supersedes the use of means; and, imagining that the work is done, there is no occasion for any ordinances to perfect that which they think is already perfected, as far as it can be this side the grave. But how such can reconcile all those passages of Scripture which refer to progressive knowledge and sanctification by the use of means I am at a loss to determine. [See page 121.] We are commanded to pray, to exhort one another, to read his word, and to assemble ourselves together; moreover, we have the promise of the Saviour that he will be in the midst of us, to bless us. Luke xviii. 1, Heb. iii. 13, Heb. x. 25, Matt. xviii. 20. We must, therefore, be suspicious of those views which would lead us to give up ordinances; for, alas! we make but little improvement and progress with them, and how much less should we make without them!

Again: Does our experience excite in us a lively concern for the good of others? This certainly is one grand criterion of its genuineness. The religion of Jesus nowhere encourages absolute seclusion from society. We are called upon, indeed, to come out from the world: we must not imbibe its spirit, follow its pleasures, or be ruled by its sinful customs.

But then we are not to bury ourselves in perpetual solitude, as if we hated all mankind, and were determined they should have no benefit from our existence. No; the spirit of Christianity is the spirit of benevolence; it wishes well to mankind; it prays for their happiness, it exerts itself for their good. Who, then, is the insensible, inanimate being, whose heart is contracted; who is destitute of every generous feeling; whose bosom never yet glowed with one benevolent wish; who never dropt a tear over the miseries of his fellow-creatures, and who never yet made one exertion to alleviate their pain, or increase their happiness? Is it the Christian? Is it he who has felt the power of divine grace? Impossible! He who has tasted that the Lord is gracious, who is convinced of his own state, and the suitability of the Gospel as the only remedy—he who has been plucked as a brand from the burning, and is himself a monument of distinguishing grace, can not be unfeeling, can not be unconcerned about others. His heart meditates good. The benevolence of his soul sets all his powers at work to invent some method, or adopt some plan, for the relief, the instruction, the happiness of those around him. By this, then, let us try ourselves. If our experience makes us satisfied with ourselves; if we can sit still from year to year without concern for others; if our property, our talents, our time, are all laid out for our own interest alone; if we rest only in cold wishes, in common-place observations on the state

of mankind; if we are ready to reproach those whose zeal shames our timidity; if we carelessly let slip opportunities of doing good which present themselves to us, and which may never return more, how can we call ourselves Christians? Let us not talk of our knowledge, our experience, our talents, our respectability, our membership of churches, while the world is falling down about us, and we sitting still in criminal inactivity. Cold heart! unfeeling creature! contracted soul! Go to the inhospitable desert, dwell in the wilderness, hide thyself from the face of man, if thou art determined to be of no use to society; but if thou professest to be a Christian, act in character. Look around; behold the multitudes perishing on the shores of eternity! What is thy knowledge if kept to thyself, while the world is in darkness? What thy talents, if not used for the advantage of those who are yet in misery? What thy experience, if it does not lead thee to commiserate the deplorable state of those who are still in the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity? Arise, therefore; shake off the slumbers of night. The sun of time is up, but will soon decline: work while it is day: for the night will soon come, when no man can work.

Lastly, and above all, let us ask, Does our experience lead to dependence on God, and obedience to him? This is the best criterion. "Herein is love, that we keep his commandments. He that is born of God sinneth not. Every man that hath this hope

in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. The grace of God that bringeth salvation teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." 1 John v. 3. 1, John iii. 9, 1 John iii. 3, Titus ii. 10, 11. If we, then, are taught of God, there will be a prevailing love for, and an habitual pursuit after holiness. Our religion will not be that of the hour, or of the day. It is not on any particular circumstance, or singularly trying occasion, that we shall be concerned. Many seem impressed for a season by alarming providences, searching discourses, or painful bereavements; but their convictions soon wear away, and they return again to the world and sensual enjoyments. But where our experience is genuine, where the work is begun, it will be carried on; sin will be increasingly hateful, and holiness increasingly lovely, in our estimation. We shall not be intimidated by the threats nor allured by the smiles of the world. We shall cheerfully bear the reproach of men, watch against the temptations of Satan, and steadfastly set our faces against sin, wherever we see it. The reason of this is evident, "because a gracious experience," says Mr. Edwards, "arises from operations and influences which are spiritual, from an inward principle which is divine, a communication of God, a participation of the divine nature: Christ living in the heart, the Holy Spirit dwelling there, in union with the faculties of the soul, as an internal vital principle, exert-

ing his own proper nature in the exercise of those faculties. Now, it is no wonder that which is divine is powerful and effectual, for it has omnipotence on its side. If God dwell in the heart, and be vitally united to it, he will show that he is a God by the efficacy of his operation. Christ is not in the heart of a saint as in a sepulchre, or as a dead Saviour, that does nothing: but as one that is in his temple, and as one that is alive from the dead. A statue may look very much like a real man, and a beautiful man; yea, it may have, in its appearance to the eye, the resemblance of a very lively, strong, and active man; but yet an inward principle of life and strength is wanting, and, therefore, it does nothing: it brings nothing to pass: there is no action or operation to answer the show. False discoveries and affections do not go deep enough to reach and govern the spring of men's actions and practice. The seed in stony ground had no deepness of earth, and the root did not go deep enough to bring forth fruit. But gracious affections go to the very bottom of the heart, and take hold of the very inmost springs of life and activity. Herein chiefly appears the powers of true godliness; viz., in its being effectual in practices. This power, indeed, is exerted in the first place within the soul, in the sensible, lively exercise of gracious affections there. Yet the principal evidence of this power of godliness is in those exercises of holy affections that are practical, and in their being practical; in conquering the will, and the

lusts and corruptions of men, and carrying men on in the way of holiness, through all temptation, difficulty, and opposition." Here, then, let us examine ourselves. What is the general bent of our will? what is the prevailing habitual inclination of our hearts? Do we regard iniquity in secret, and love to practice it when we have opportunity? and are we hardened and careless when we have committed it, as if it were a light thing? If so, whatever are our raptures, however affected we may be under the word, however loquacious in our talk, or however extensive our knowledge or brilliant our talents, we have reason to think we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. On the contrary, if our practice be holy and uniform; if we are continually maintaining a conflict with sin; if it be that which is more hateful to us than any other object; if we choose suffering before sinning; if we are breathing after the divine image, and aiming at his glory; then, although our knowledge may be but small, our hearts often depressed, our gifts but slender, and we are incapable of saying much before others, we have reason to conclude that we are not deceived. For, surely, if the Lord had meant to have destroyed us, he would not have shown us such things as these. But let us proceed now to a

Second Advice: *Learn not to abuse experience.*

Experience may be abused by boasting of it as extraordinary, by living and depending on it, by introducing it at improper times, and before improper persons.

First: We should not boast of our experience as always extraordinary. Doubtless there may be experiences which may be considered as singular, and out of the way; and it is not for us to limit the Deity, or prescribe to him how he is to act as to his operations on the minds of his creatures. And such experience may, under the influence of prudence, be related to others as extraordinary. But to be *always* talking of ourselves, or of our experience as singular, as if none had felt as we have; to assume to ourselves a degree of consequence on the account thereof, and almost to despise others because we think they have not experienced the same as ourselves, this is an abuse of experience. A little acquaintance with others will teach us, that our experience is not so singular as we imagine; and that we have no occasion to boast or talk as if we were the only individuals who have been led in a peculiar path. It savors, also, too much of pride to be *continually* dwelling on subjects relative to ourselves, as if we wanted others to admire us; for though a just relation of what God has done for us will be highly grateful and useful to others, yet, if we are not cautious, we shall justly incur the charge of egotism and vanity, and prove, at the same time, that our experience can not be very great.

Again: it is an abuse of experience to live and depend on it. We may certainly derive considerable advantage from the recollection of past experiences, and by using them as evidences of grace.

It is pleasant to look back on the way which the Lord hath led us, and to remember the interpositions of his providence, the supplies of his grace, the answers he hath given to our prayers, and the deliverances he hath wrought in time of danger. But it is an abuse of experience, if we expect the Divine Being always to act exactly in the same way; that he will answer our prayers just at such a time; that he will give us the same *degree* of comfort. It is true, he has promised that he will never leave nor forsake his people; but in what way he may be pleased to work for us, whether instantaneously or gradually, whether by the same instruments or others, we must leave to him. Our dependence must be on the promise, not on our feelings. He is a Sovereign, and acts in his own way, and that frequently very different from our plans and schemes; and this he does, that we might ever remember that our safety, our comfort, our every good, is at his disposal; and that we must rely on him, and not on means or even past circumstances. But it is still a greater abuse of experience, when we place such a dependence on former events, so as to preclude present exertions. It is no reason, because God has sometimes appeared to work without means, that therefore we are to be indolent, or to lay aside the use of those means which he has wisely instituted for the carrying on his own work; for though *he* is not bound to them, *we* are. Young ministers have sometimes erred in this respect. They have, perhaps, been called sud-

denly to engage in the work of preaching, before they have had time for much study or thought. They have enjoyed much liberty—perhaps more than on occasions when they have made the greatest preparations. They have immediately thought, surely, if I can preach in this way, where is the necessity of premeditation or study? They have ascended the pulpit with a degree of confidence; they imagined all would be the same; that they should have no cause to fear; but how soon have they been disappointed! how soon have they learnt their error! God has shown them that they had been making a wrong use of their feelings; that they had been placing confidence on their experience, rather than on him. Hearers, likewise, err in this respect: when they have felt themselves happy in a particular place, under such a sermon, or on a particular occasion, they are apt to imagine that the same place, the same minister, the same circumstance, will produce the same comfort. But how often do we hear complaints of their disappointment! and the reason is evident, because they have relied more upon the circumstances than the divine blessing. It becomes, then, a great abuse of experience to substitute it in the place of Christ himself, or to eye our experiences instead of the divine glory, and the excellences of the Gospel. Let Christians watch, also, against being guided by their passions and feelings, for this often becomes a source of error and distress. "Such," says Dr. Watts, "live very much by fits and starts

of devotion, without that uniform and steady spring of faith which would render their religion more even and uniform, more honorable to God, and more comfortable to themselves. They are always high on the wing, or else lying moveless on the ground. They are ever in the heights or the depths; travelling on bright mountains with the songs of heaven on their lips, or groaning and laboring through the dark valleys, and never walking onward, as on an even plain, towards heaven."

Another abuse of experience is, the introducing it at improper times. As there is a time to speak, so there is a time to be silent. Sometimes we are called to hear others; and as others have something to relate as well as we, it is indecorous and imprudent to occupy the whole time ourselves, and not to let others have an opportunity to declare what God has done for them. There are some good people, who, from a natural volubility, a degree of zeal, and who possess more courage than others, may be reprehensible as to this. You never see them in the background. They never dwell in the shade. They must be foremost. Now, as this boldness does not arise in general from their having greater discoveries or a deeper experience than others, but is, perhaps, constitutional and natural, they ought to maintain a perpetual watch over themselves, lest by intrusion they keep back others, who, perhaps, are more solid in their judgment, more extensive in their knowledge, more rich in experience, than themselves.

Perhaps it would be better in general, also, to wait till we are called upon; a loquacious person is often suspected, and certainly the more we know of ourselves, the less we shall be disposed to shine by appearances of profound experience and wisdom. "A person," says Dr. Edwards, "may be over-full of talk of his own experience, commonly falling upon it everywhere, and in all companies; and when it is so, it is rather a dark sign than a good one. As a tree that is over-full of leaves, seldom bears much fruit; and as a cloud, though, to appearance, very pregnant and full of water, if it brings with it overmuch wind, seldom affords much rain to the dry and thirsty earth; such persons, therefore, by their forwardness, will at least expose themselves to the suspicion of others; and, truly, they ought to be exceeding minute and particular in the examination of their motives, since that which they take for zeal at the bottom may be nothing more than a desire to exalt themselves.

The young and inexperienced are sometimes apt to err on this point. Youthful vigor, lively apprehension, little knowledge of the human heart, and warm desires, may sometimes prompt them to take the chair of the older and more experienced. These are rather to be pitied than condemned, as they will learn better as they advance in the Christian life: I would here, however, give my young readers advice to watch against forwardness, to pay a proper deference to older Christians, to read and think much,

to avoid loquaciousness, to be humble and docile, rather to be desirous of hearing the experience of others than relating their own: so shall you have praise and encouragement; you will rise in the esteem and affection of the righteous; you will share in their prayers, and be benefited by their advice; while, at the same time, you will give evidence that you are making progress in divine things.

Once more, it is an abuse of experience to introduce it before improper persons. It was our Lord's advice, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." Matt. vii. 7. And the psalmist invited the righteous *only*, and not all indiscriminately, to hear what God had done for his soul. Ps. lxvi. 16. To reprove the wicked with mildness, to warn them, in the spirit of love, of the error of their way, to endeavor to inform and instruct them when we have opportunity, is highly proper and desirable; but to talk to them of Christian experience is not appropriate or judicious. As they know nothing of the hopes and fears, the sorrows and joys, the views and feelings of the Christian, whose life may be considered as a hidden life to them, it must either tend to harden their hearts, or at least lead them to form strange and confused ideas of our religion. The apostle justly says, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolish-

ness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor. ii. 14. What ideas can the dead, the blind, form of surrounding objects? and what idea can those who are spiritually dead form of the acts and exercises, springs and principles, habits and progress, of grace and holiness? Surely none at all. How inconsistent, therefore, to be continually relating our experience before or to them! They consider it only as enthusiasm, or the effects of a wild and disordered imagination, while they reproach the subjects of it as being deluded, and take occasion from their own ignorance to harden themselves still more in their sinful courses. Thus I have endeavored to consider a few instances wherein experience may be abused. I proceed now to the

Third Advice: *Be cautious as to the manner in which you relate your experience.*

As to the propriety of relating our experience, we have already considered this in the eighth chapter. There is no doubt of its being useful, when conducted in a proper manner. And, first of all, I would observe, that it should be done with the greatest humility. Pride assaults us in everything we do for the glory of God. And we have great need to watch, lest it should be manifest here. Every thing that savors of ostentation, love of praise, and high opinions of ourselves, should be avoided. Nor should it be to obtain a name for *great experience*, or to be marked as one who is superior to all others.

Humility at all times is commendable, but it should particularly appear when we speak of ourselves. Let us herein follow the example of the great apostle. His attainments indeed were high, his usefulness great; but how does he speak of himself, and what humility runs through all his relation! "I am nothing. Less than the least of all. The chief of sinners. Wretched man!" 1 Cor. xiii. 3, Eph. iii. 8, 1 Tim. i. 15, Rom. vii. 24.

And here I beg leave to say a word respecting the practice of some who are in the habit of relating their own experience in the pulpit. They are always talking of what they have done; of the extraordinary light they have had into particular subjects, and the sufferings they have borne for the sake of the cross. Now, I must confess, I am not of the opinion of those who think it improper for ministers at any time to declare their feelings or experience in public; yet I think it should be done but seldom, and with much caution, because it is rather preaching ourselves than Christ; it may have an unfavorable impression on the minds of many of the hearers, and, as one justly observes, it has the air of a *standard* for the people, and so, apt to excite in some contempt, and in others unnecessary fears. But to return; the relation of our experience should be with prudence, and always with a design to do good. Some say too much, others too little. There is no occasion to reveal the whole of our minds to every body; nor is it prudent, perhaps, to be always tell-

ing our secret trials even to our brethren and friends, since, after all, they may form a wrong judgment, and we may do ourselves an injury. On the other hand, we should not be unnecessarily reserved. We may tell our experience so far as it may be productive of good to others. To keep everything to ourselves is the way to increase our own sorrow, to preclude the help and sympathy of others towards us. The mind is relieved by the communication of its exercises. Besides, a reserved Christian runs the hazard of incurring opprobrium, and can scarcely be said to be useful to others. It is best, then, to watch against an extreme; neither to be too forward in relating our experience, lest we should say more than is truth, or than we intended to say; nor to be too backward, lest we should lose opportunities of strengthening and assisting others, and also expose ourselves to censure, by giving others reason to think we do not possess that amiable spirit, that lovely temper, which the Gospel inculates. Some allowances, perhaps, may be made for the timid Christian; but it would be advisable for such to endeavor to conquer a fearfulness which is often injurious to their happiness. Weak nerves, the consciousness of ignorance and imperfection in themselves: the too high opinion, perhaps, which they form of the experience or the wisdom of others, cause them to dwell in obscurity, and make them fearful of saying anything about themselves. But they must watch against a timidity which may degenerate into sinful-

ness; a humility which would drive them from their brethren, and render them useless in society. The apostle says, "It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing." Gal. iv. 18. We behold zeal displayed in almost every worldly thing. The achievements of the hero, the attainments of the learned, the exertions of the benevolent, are reïterated from place to place with unceasing praises. But how much more reason has a Christian to exult and rejoice, to dwell on the rapturous theme of divine goodness, to relate the wonders of redeeming grace and dying love! Think, therefore, O timid and fearful believer, what cause you have to open your lips, and show forth his praise. If God had made you inanimate, if he had never conferred on you any favor, if you had been created a stock or a stone, then, like an inanimate being, you might be silent. But he has made you a rational and an immortal soul. He has heaped innumerable favors upon you; he has delivered you from misery and wrath; he has given his own Son to bleed, to die for you, that you might live and be happy for ever. How, then, can you be dumb?

Lastly: In the relation of experience, let us all keep the glory of God in view; let us do it with joy and gratitude. Instead of dwelling with sorrow on the recollection of our past trials, let us rather rejoice that we have been supported under them; that we have been brought through them; that they have all been rendered subservient to our real good.

How few have been our sorrows, when compared to our joys! how few our pains to our pleasures! how few our crosses to our blessings! May we not all say with the psalmist, "Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul! and forget not all his benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies. Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." Ps. ciii. 1–5. Let us often, then, speak one to another of what God has done for us. Perhaps this will form part of our employ in the celestial world. Let us even now, therefore, begin this happy work: we have all mercies to enumerate, deliverances to remember, favors to record. Let us animate each other by the way, and, by a just and prudent relation of our experience, be the means of strengthening the weak hands, confirming the feeble knees, and exciting others to go forward with renewed alacrity in the path to happiness and to glory.

But we shall close this chapter with

Fourth Advice, *relative to experience books and experience meetings.*

As to experience books, or journals of our own feelings and experience, they certainly may be useful. Some have used them, however, without much prudence. Things of little or no consequence have been

inserted. Common circumstances have been recorded as singular events; and events which happen to all, as if they were peculiar to an individual. Pages have been filled with accounts of remarkable elevations or depressions, alternate joys and sorrows, without ever tracing the springs or sources of either; and perhaps a whole volume of things of this kind, without any judicious reflection, and in which, after all, nothing can be traced of a mind intent upon her own operations, or wisely attempting to trace the causes, or examine the effects of the feelings so recorded. Here, too, we can not but observe the impropriety of publishing such accounts to the world after the author's decease; since they afford nothing new, nothing striking, nothing that will any way tend to enlarge or improve our minds, and which, perhaps, the author himself never thought of having made public.

But I am no enemy to religious journals, or experience books, provided they be kept with propriety, and not made the registers of every trifling event, every common circumstance. I think they may be greatly conducive to our encouragement and spiritual profit. Our memories are often slippery. "It is true (as Mr. Flavel says) that things that greatly affect us are not easily forgotten by us; and yet how ordinary is it for new impressions to raze out former ones! It was a saying of that worthy man Dr. Harris, 'My memory (said he) never failed me in all my life; for, indeed, I durst never trust

it.' Written memorials secure us against that hazard, and, besides, make them useful to others when we are gone. So that you carry not away all your treasure to heaven with you, but leave these choice legacies to your surviving friends. Certainly it were not so great a loss to lose your silver, your goods, and chattels, as it is to lose your experiences which God hath this way given you in this world. Take heed, however (continues Mr. Flavel), of clasping up those rich treasures in a book, and thinking it enough to have noted them there; but have frequent recourse to them as oft as new wants, fears, or difficulties arise and assault you."

As to what are called experience meetings, or meetings held for the express purpose of relating experience, under proper management they may become useful. Great care, however, should be taken not to introduce family concerns. Order should be punctually observed, every one speaking in his turn; and if there be a president or leader, he may vary his questions so that the meeting may not degenerate into a dull, formal, unmeaning service.

As it respects the admission of persons into church membership, by a relation of their experience, some are of opinion that it is a useful plan; others think it is not necessary, and that to require it keeps back many who are weak, and who, though they are serious, yet can not give any circumstantial account of their experience. It is proper that candidates for admission should give evidence some way or other

of sincere repentance of sin, and of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation; and it is strange to conceive how a man has felt a change of heart without being able to communicate his sentiments, or express his feelings, in some degree. Yet I do not think that it is essential for any one to give a minute and particular account of all the steps and methods by which the Holy Spirit wrought this change. Nor do I think that any relation of experience is sufficient for the admission of members. Hypocrites can sometimes give a better account than some weak believers; so that, by a more dependence on the relation of experience, we may be deceived. On the whole, I think, if there be any evidence of faith and repentance, we should be extremely cautious what barriers we put in the way. There may be much ignorance where there is much sincerity. Some can not write; others are filled with timidity when they come before a church, the greatest part of whom, perhaps, are strangers. Allowances must be made for men's natural dispositions, and for their infirmities too. We must not despise the day of small things. Where a full and accurate account can be given, it is pleasant and edifying; but where it can not, as long as we are satisfied with the *character*, we ought not to reject, lest we do an injury to the weak, and refuse those whom Christ has accepted.

CHAPTER XII.

THE EVIL OF THE WANT OF EXPERIENCE.

It has often been justly remarked, that nothing can supply the place of experience. This is found true in every department of life. Whatever knowledge we may obtain, whatever talents we possess, whatever fine speculations we may pursue, we are likely to expose ourselves to danger without experience. How superior is that general who has been in the field, to him who has *only studied* military tactics in his closet! How much more skilful is the mariner who has had to contend with the storm, than he who has only studied navigation at home! How much more acute, active, and watchful is that man who has been long accustomed to business, than he who has only learnt the first principles of it from books or mere instruction! As we pass along the walks of life, what sad scenes present themselves! What reputation lost! what health ruined! what property wasted! Do we ask, From whence all this? The answer is, The want of experience. How frequently are tidings brought of creditors defrauded, of apparently flourishing plans frustrated, of pro-

mising schemes all terminating in confusion! If we ask, From whence all this! the answer is, The want of experience. As we pass on, what numbers do we find actually slain, and lying dead about us! Do we ask, Who slew all these? The answer is, Inexperience. But it is not in worldly concerns only that men are exposed to danger from this, but in concerns of still greater importance. What folly may be sometimes discovered in our conduct! What ignorance beclouds our views! What false conclusions do we draw, and what contracted ideas do we form of many things in a religious point of view, and all from a want of more experience! Behold even the disciples of our Lord; although they attended his ministrations, were effectually called by his grace, and were enabled to renounce the world for his name's sake, yet what ignorance and inexperience did they sometimes manifest! Take the following instance: "Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children, with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye seek. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able." Matt. xx. 20–23. These sons of Zebedee were James and John, two of our

Lord's favorite disciples, and yet what a sad mistake were they guilty of! What ambition, what pride, what ignorance, what confidence! Ah! ye beloved disciples, it is you that dream of honor! How little have ye experienced of the cross that is first to be borne! It is you that we hear say, "We are able?" As before you knew not what you asked, so surely now you know not what you say. What! are you able to drink of the cup of sufferings without murmuring? Are you able to bear reproach without contradiction? Are you able to endure afflictions, necessities, oppositions, temptations, and crosses, and even to be exposed to martyrdom and death, without fear? How little do you know as yet of the sufferings of the cross! How little yet of the frowns of the world, the temptations of Satan, the corruption of the heart! And yet you say, We are able. What language! What inexperience! What rashness!

But we need not dwell on the faults of the disciples. How many have we around us who, like them, are continually saying, "We are able," and whose experience has led them to think they can do all things easily; who have rushed into danger without thought, and involved themselves in misery by confiding in their own strength! Alas! turn which way we will, we behold multitudes who are suffering for want of that wisdom which can only be derived from experience, and who, regardless of the advice and experience of others, have been

guided by their own self-will and precipitate spirit. But we will now proceed more particularly to specify some of those evils which arise from want of experience in religious concerns.

And, first, we observe that inexperience exposes us to the snares of the world. How soon are young professors led aside! The specious arguments, the fair promises, the alluring prospects which are held out, too often deceive them. How ready are worldly men to insinuate that there is no occasion to be so much concerned about religion; that it will have a tendency to disorder their minds; that worldly pleasures and amusements, so long as we do not injure our neighbors, are not only lawful but necessary! Thus they compel the inexperienced to go with them a little way, under the idea that all shall be for their happiness; or, if it should not, that it is easy to return. But, alas! what is the consequence? They find themselves entangled and bewildered. They are afraid to go forward; they are almost ashamed to go back. Conscience reproaches. The guilt of apostacy appears as a frightful spectre. The thought of listening to the world, rather than to God, cuts them to the heart. And now, what is the cause of all this? Is it not want of experience? Do we not hear them say, "Little did we think the world had such designs upon us. It was but a *small* step we *first* took from the right path. We thought we had strength enough to recover ourselves, or prevent the world from drawing us any farther. How

greatly deceived! Had we known the consequences, how should we have trembled! But, alas! we were insensibly led on from one thing to another, till we were surrounded by the enemy, and found the fatal consequence of obeying man rather than God." How different is it with those who have experience! They, too, are attacked. The world waits and watches for them. It tries them in every point. But they are not so easily deluded. They know its artifices, they guard against its allurements. They have learnt the evil of hearkening to its propositions, and they flee the company of its votaries, knowing that a wound may be received in a moment which will take years to heal.

The want of experience exposes us to the temptations of Satan. This great enemy possesses much experience himself. The Scriptures inform us of his *wiles*, his *fiery darts*, his *depths*, his *devices*. Eph. vi. 11, 16, Rev. ii. 24, 2 Cor. ii. 11. And if he attack the strong, it is no wonder he does the weak. Too often, indeed, he gains the advantage over the young Christian. He can either be as a roaring lion to alarm, or as an angel of light to deceive. How often have the young ventured on his ground, unsuspicious of the snares he has set for them! They have even mistook so far as to imagine that it was a kind preparation made by Providence for their ease, instead of its being an artifice of Satan, in order to render them miserable. Alas! how many thousands have had to regret their want of

experience, their little knowledge of the wiles of Satan, and their little watchfulness against so insidious an enemy! Divine power, however, is manifested in the preservation of those whose experience, though small, is genuine; and we have still greater reason to lament over the ravages Satan commits among them, who, notwithstanding their apparent love to the truth, and long profession of it, have been led captive by him. He has strongly insinuated that they might serve God and love the world too; that it is not to be expected, in this state of things, that men should be always consistent and uniform; that God is too merciful to require it; that a man's temporal advantage must be sought and attended to before any other object; till, at last, the man is brought to believe that religion is nothing, that doubts may be lawfully entertained as to the truth of the Bible, that an attendance on ordinances is unnecessary, and that he may either make a profession of religion or not, just as it suits his own interest. Thus the man's eyes are blinded, and his heart hardened; he stifles his conviction, and returns to the world, where he is continually seen a miserable vassal in Satan's dominion, and every moment exposed to eternal misery. And all this is the consequence of his having no real experience of divine things. He came from the world to the church with a bad motive, and now he returns from the church to the world under the influence of the same principle.

Again: Inexperience exposes us to error. How many characters do the Scriptures present us with who erred from the truth, and all for want of a real experience of the energy of divine grace! Things novel and plausible strike the mind, and they who have but little acquaintance with divine subjects are easily deceived. Error too often bears a great resemblance to truth; and not only so, but, as it is too often allied with some corruption in the heart, is more likely to meet with a welcome reception. I do not mean to say that we should not use our reasoning powers in the pursuit of truth, or that we should be guided more by our feelings than by our understanding. This would be dangerous indeed. But, after all, what are our finest speculations, our metaphysical inquiries, our nicest perceptions, our deepest and most profound reasonings, without divine teaching? It is this alone that gives the mind a right bias, which enables it both to discern and to relish truth. Without this we shall be continually wavering. Now *this* will strike; then *that*. One thing will appear plausible for a while, then another. Thus we shall be tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. Eph. iv. 14. Now, a real experience, arising from the knowledge and love of God, will secure us from this evil. The heart will be established with grace; and though those who have but just set out may have been betrayed into

error for want of more knowledge and experience, yet, as the Word of God is the standard to which they bring every sentiment and doctrine, their light shall increase, and their minds become more settled; for "he that doeth his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." John vii. 17. To such, also, the Divine Spirit is promised, to guide into all truth. John xvi. 13.

Further: A want of experience exposes us to pride and ambition. Had the two disciples before mentioned been more experienced, they would not have been so desirous of such elevated situations. He who knows but little of his own heart, and has seen but little of the world, covets great things for himself, seeks to move in a higher circle, desires to be more known; but he is ignorant that the more lofty the situation, the more dangerous his state. Corruptions which now lie dormant in his heart may then be drawn out; and snares which now he knows nothing of will then beset him. Pride, also, is often an attendant on superficial talents, little experience, and ignorance of ourselves. How do we feel for such when we hear their insignificant conversation, their vain boasting, their conceited talk of self-formed projects of mighty achievements, and superior wisdom! How does an experienced Christian feel when he stands by and hears the talk of those who have hardly ever heard the wind, or felt the storm! What mingled emotions of pity and fear, of sorrow and concern, fill his breast! How ready is

he to say, "Did you but know how ignorant the wisest think themselves, how little is known when compared with what is to be known, how little dependence there is to be placed on human nature, how contracted and feeble a creature man is at his best estate, how incapable he is either to guide or protect himself, how vulnerable on every side by a thousand darts poisoned by the enemy, how liable to perpetual vicissitudes, and how generally disappointed in the objects which he has most set his heart upon to obtain,—ah! did you but know, did you but consider, how would it check your vanity, and cool your ambition!" Yes, truly, how much more humble is the man of experience, the man who knows his heart, who has felt the strokes of adversity, who has too often been deceived by his enemies, disappointed in his expectations from the creature, and suffered from his own weakness and infirmity! See how quietly he walks, how cautious in every step, how unaspiring in his views, how suspicious of himself, how unassuming in his conversation; while the young, the rash, the inexperienced, on the contrary, are noisy and vain, turbulent and forward, self-confident, and big with expectation of good, which, after all, the world denies them, leaving them to murmur and fret over their own misery and folly.

Another evil, attendant on inexperience, is a spirit of bigotry. Such are apt to be contracted and narrow-minded. The religion of Christ, so far as it

is understood, has a tendency to enlarge the mind, and make us candid towards others; and those who have felt most of its power will be most disposed to be charitable and liberal. Who, then, is it that deals in anathemas; who is ready to condemn all who do not exactly agree with him; who restricts salvation to his own party; who claims the prerogative of thinking for himself, but will not allow it to others, who, because they can not see with his eyes, or believe with his understanding, are therefore, in his opinion, strangers to truth? Is it the man of experience? Is it he who knows anything of the nature of man, and the prejudices which arise from various sources? Certainly not. Experience teaches us to be candid. The more we are acquainted with ourselves, the more we shall be willing to bear with others. The more the love of God is shed abroad in our own souls, the more love we shall feel for our fellow creatures. The narrow bigot in a corner may look with an evil eye on all who differ from him; but the experienced Christian is not an unfeeling, reserved, morose character. The more he knows, and the longer he lives, the more is he convinced of the impropriety of such a spirit.

It is, however, an evil into which young Christians sometimes fall. Yea, even the disciples of our Lord were guilty for want of more knowledge and experience. "John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him." And why? "Because he followeth

not with us." Luke ix. 49, 50. What a weak reason! what a poor pretense for discouraging him! And yet, alas! this is the only reason many can give for wishing to restrain others from active exertions in the cause of religion and humanity, *They follow not with them.* They have not received their education where they have. They belong not to their community. They do not adopt exactly the same mode of worship as they do. *Therefore* they must be forbidden! O, wretched spirit of bigotry! how evidential of ignorance and inexperience! What said the Saviour to these disciples? "Forbid him not; for he that is not against us is for us." Happy would it be if this answer of our Lord were but more considered. What evils would be prevented in our churches! How much more good might be done! How would love and harmony prevail, the designs of Satan be frustrated, and the cause of God and truth greatly promoted!

Further: A want of experience of the power of divine things has been the cause not only of bigotry, but, what is closely allied with it, persecution. We should never have heard of the tortures, the pains, the dreadful sufferings of so many thousands on the account of religion, if men had been influenced by a right spirit, and experienced the grace of God in truth. It is no part of the religion of Christ to persecute others who differ from us. Yet where mere speculation, and a false zeal, have been placed as a substitute for real experience, we see what has

been the consequence. Here, again, we find the very disciples of our Lord acting inconsistently. "It came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before his face. And they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, as Elias did? But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Luke ix. 51, 56. How little did they know of the genius, and how little had they experienced of the power of Christianity! How much of pride and resentment, of persecution and cruelty, were mixed with their zeal! "James and John," as one observes, "were the two disciples whom Christ had called Boanerges, sons of thunder (Mark iii. 17); but that will not serve them—they must be sons of lightning too." They did not ask leave that they might go and preach, warn, and suitably reprove them. Nay, it was not enough that they might even threaten and alarm them. Nothing short of final extirpation, of entire destruction, was the subject of their petition! And what! were these the disciples of Him who was all love and kindness; who came to save

and not to destroy? Alas! what havoc would the rash and inexperienced make, if left to themselves! Mistaking the design of the Gospel, they would be for carrying everything by violence and persecution. According to their spirit, we should see nothing around us but monuments of divine vengeance, towns and kingdoms destroyed, families and individuals struck with death, and the universal conflagration taking place before its appointed time. Indeed, what but the rash zeal, the want of experience of divine love, the superstition and ignorance of men, have deluged the Christian world with blood, thrown down the altars of others to erect their own, anathematized whole communities, and given the enemy reason to triumph and rejoice? O, how necessary to *feel* the force of Christian sentiments on our hearts! then should we never attempt to injure and destroy one another.

There is an evil which is often prevalent among the inexperienced, which, though not so great as the last mentioned, yet deserves to be reprehended; and that is slander and detraction. It is no uncommon thing to see persons who have but little knowledge of themselves, and whose experience is but small, indulging themselves in this practice. Ignorant in a great measure of the depravity of their own hearts, a slight acquaintance with the wiles and snares of Satan, a too great confidence in an opinion of themselves, they are ready to spy out the faults of others. I have generally found that the most superficial in

true knowledge and genuine experience have been the most forward in this practice; whether it arises from a conviction of their own deficiency, and a wish to believe that all others are like them, or whether from a want of self-knowledge, and a habit of observing the infirmities of others rather than their own, can not, perhaps, be always determined. This, however, is evident; that in proportion as we have more experience, see more of our own imperfection, know more of the nature of the human heart, and possess more of the Christian spirit, the less shall we be disposed to slander and speak evil of others; for grace will teach us modesty, humility, self-diffidence, candor, and forbearance. Let the slanderer, therefore, remember that he gives but little evidence of his heart being right with God, while his tongue is employed in blasting the reputation or magnifying the infirmities of others.

Lastly: Want of experience often induces men to undertake situations they are not qualified for, and thus exposes them to ruin. How does a truly wise and experienced man shrink back from situations of importance, while the inexperienced rush by with rapidity and confidence! All is easily done in their imagination. They stop not to consider difficulties; and even if others have failed, they think they shall not. And thus they never know their error till it is too late. They rise with confidence, but they come down with shame. They leave the more experienced far behind; but they meet them with confusion on

their return; while many point to them and say, "This man began to build, but was not able to finish." Luke xiv. 30. Ah! how many have been wounded by this, and, for want of knowledge founded on experience at first, have so disgraced themselves as to be glad to retire again into the obscure vale, and to pass along unheard, unnoticed by their fellow travellers! Yea, what is worse, how many, by endeavoring to climb too high, have fallen down, and been dashed to pieces! Alas! on how many tombs may be read the inscription, "Here lie the remains of one who was killed for want of experience!"

We have now considered a few of those evils attendant on inexperience, and that not only as it relates to those who know nothing of religion at all, but as it respects the young Christian, and those who rest only in bare speculation or profession. We will now conclude this work by just making two or three remarks from the whole.

Let us all learn to examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith. Have we passed from darkness to light? Have we ever experienced the depravity of our hearts, and the bitterness of sin? Have we ever been led to see the vanity and insufficiency of the world to make us happy? Have we been enabled to take up our cross, and to follow the Saviour through evil as well as good report? Have we tasted that the Lord is gracious, renounced the world for his sake; and can we now say, that he is

our portion, and that we count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of him? These are solemn, interesting questions. Reader, put them to thy heart, and ask what is thy real state before God.

Let us learn to be wise from the inexperience of others. While we look around, and see the fatal effects of ignorance and rashness, carelessness and want of experience, let it suggest to us caution and prudence, vigilance and dependence on God. As we behold the broken plans, the half-finished schemes, the painful disgrace, of those who have trusted to themselves, let us be suspicious of our own hearts. As we pass by the spots memorable only for the sad scenes of inexperience, let us look up to heaven and say, "O Lord, keep me as the apple of thine eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings. How soon may I be numbered among the miserable and wretched, if not kept by thee! Preserve me from all the snares of the world, and the temptations of the enemy. Keep me from rashness and folly. Give me that wisdom which is profitable to direct. Let me experience more of thy grace, which alone can hold me up, and render me safe."

Let us deplore the sad case of those who are still enveloped in darkness, who never had any experience of the power of divine grace. They are perpetually exposed to danger. Having no taste for heavenly things, they are continually sinning against God. Yea, sin is their delight, and holi-

ness the object of their hatred. Miserable man! how deplorable thy case! A rational, immortal creature, born for eternity, yet without love to God, without any thought for the everlasting salvation of thy soul! Stand still, and consider for a moment thy wretched situation. Remember, without experience of *grace* in time, there can be no *happiness* in eternity. Hear the voice of Scripture: "Except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God. Without holiness no man can see the Lord. He that believeth not, the wrath of God abideth on him." Jo. iii. 3, Heb. xii. 14, Jo. iii. 36. Cry, therefore, to God for mercy; consider how short time is. A few more moments, and thou wilt be in eternity! Behold, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation! May God enlighten thine eyes before it be too late! may the Holy Spirit teach thee the way of truth and salvation, and thus shalt thou be happy for ever!

Let us lament, also, that there are so many who are only nominal Christians, who have a name to live, but are dead; and still more distressing to reflect on the case of many who are called Christian ministers, and yet never feel what they preach; who have never experienced anything of the power of divine grace, but who are still worldly-minded, vain, covetous, and disobedient. How dull and inanimate their preaching! How awful their state! How useless their lives! Yea, how fatal their example! Let such remember that no specu-

lative knowledge, no respectability of talent, can be a substitute for experience. Without this, how can they enter into the spirit of their subject? How address their hearers under their various feelings and circumstances? How speak to him who knows the plague of his own heart—to the tried, the tempted, the afflicted soul? Brilliancy of genius, stores of literature, powers of eloquence, may show the man, but can not make the *useful* minister of Jesus. How necessary, then, to feel, to experience, in order to do good to immortal souls! Let us pity and pray for those who are still ignorant, that the Lord may open their eyes, and lead them into the way of truth; that, instead of a curse, they may become a blessing to mankind.

Finally: Reader, if you have felt the power of renovating grace, how thankful ought you to be! You may surely go on your way rejoicing. You shall still experience more of his love. The riches of his grace shall be still more unfolded; and you shall arrive at last at the mansions of glory, where you shall be employed in ascribing all the praise of your salvation to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever.

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